Isaac Asimov: Out of the Everywhere

FDC58370

Fantasy & Science Fiction

NOVEMBER

$2.00 US • CANADA $2.50 • UK £1.80

Kirinyaga

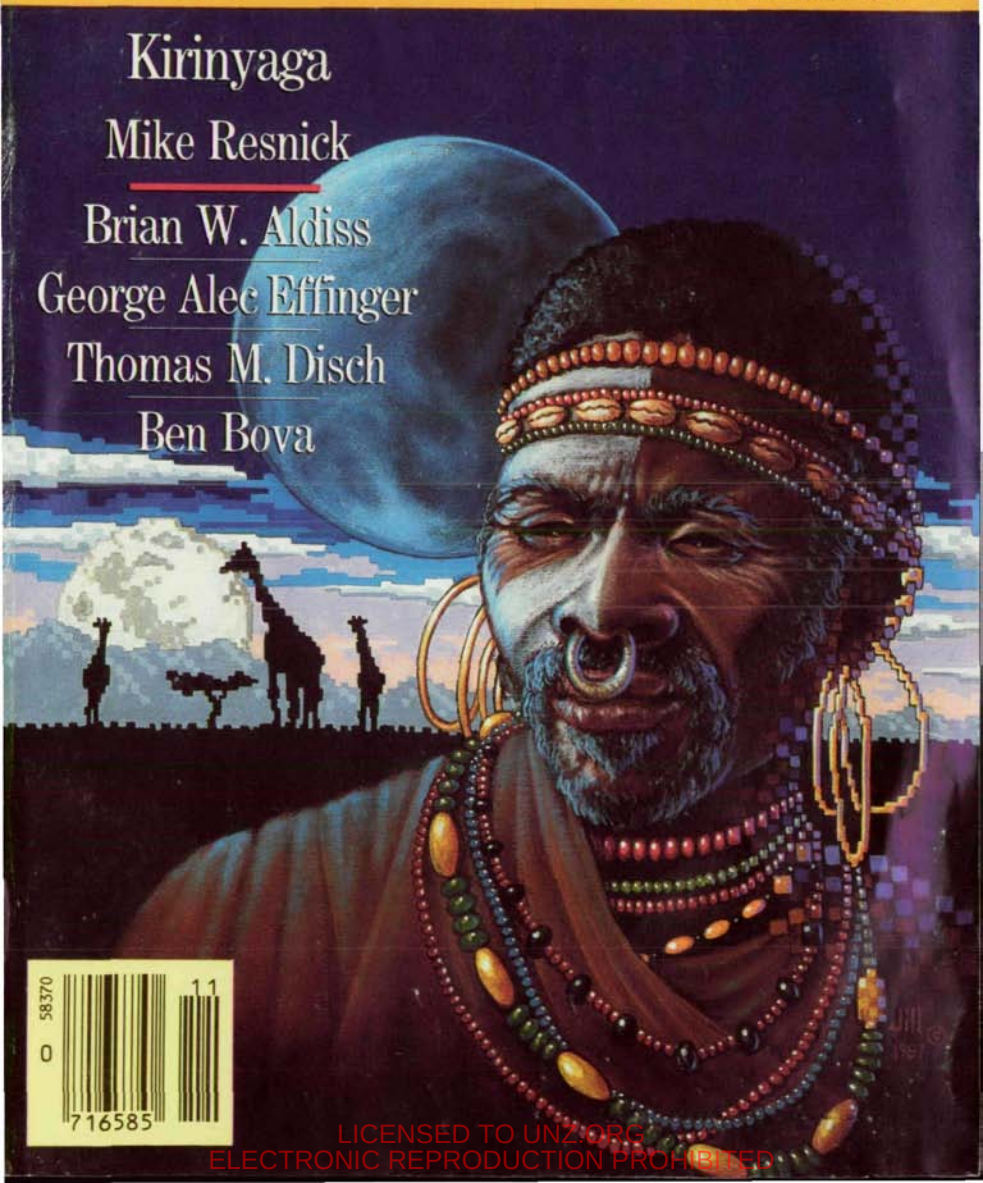
Mike Resnick

Brian W. Aldiss

George Alec Effinger

Thomas M. Disch

Ben Bova



LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FROM ONE OF "SF's MOST EXPERT AND ENGAGING DREAMERS."*

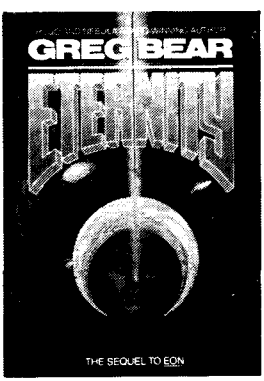
ETERNITY

THE LONG-AWAITED SEQUEL TO THE CRITICALLY ACCLAIMED BESTSELLER,

EON

GREG BEAR

Captivating, deftly plotted and breathtakingly imaginative, ETERNITY follows the stunning close of Eon with its own thrilling, tension-filled adventure.



The winner of multiple Hugo and Nebula awards, Greg Bear has created in ETERNITY his most powerful novel yet.

*Arthur C. Clarke

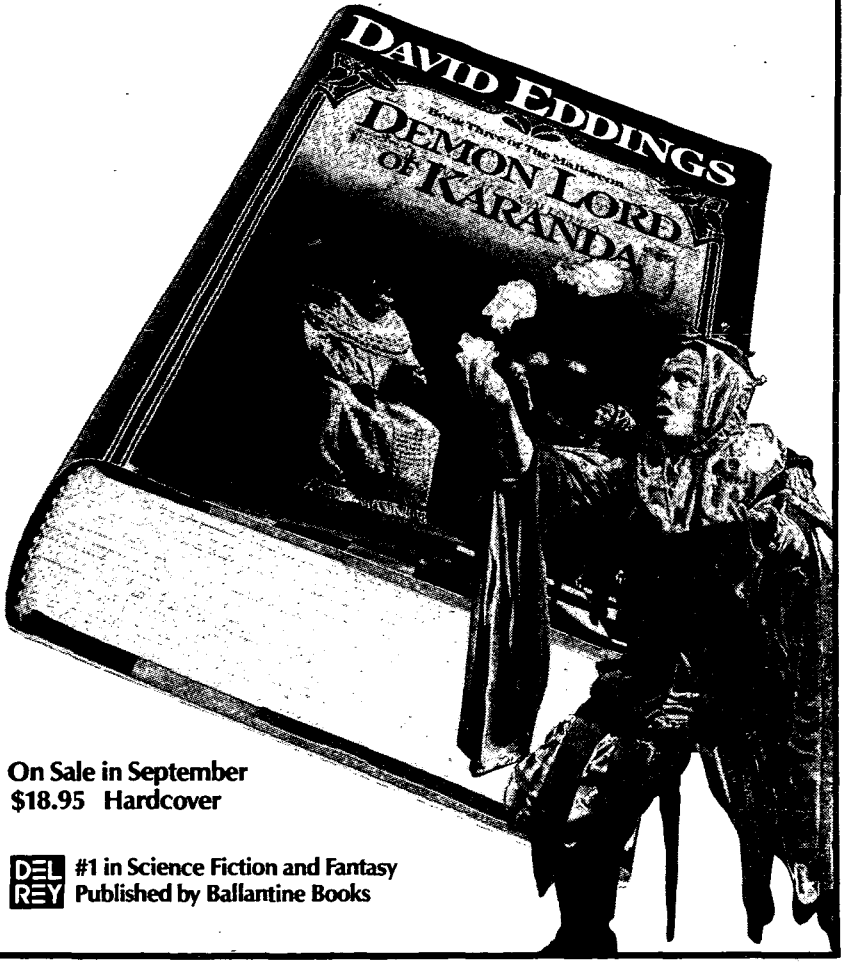
A Warner Hardcover
On Sale
At All Bookstores

WARNER BOOKS
A Warner Communication Company

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An irresistible sequel to *the New York Times* bestseller, *King of the Murgos*

King Garion, ancient Belgarath, and Polgara were pursuing Zandramas, who had stolen Garion's infant son. But Zandramas fled to where a horrible ritual would use the child to destroy the hope of all mankind. Now time was running out for the pursuers!



On Sale in September
$18.95 Hardcover

DEL REY **#1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy**
Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The new masterpiece by
"science fiction's hottest author."

MONA LISA OVERDRIVE

WILLIAM GIBSON

AWARD-WINNING
AUTHOR OF
NEUROMANCER

BANTAM

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy & Science Fiction

Including VENTURE SCIENCE FICTION

NOVEMBER • 40th Year of Publication

NOVELETS

INHERITANCE	54	**Paul J. McAuley**
POSTERITY	100	**George Alec Effinger**
DIAMOND SAM	140	**Ben Bova**

SHORT STORIES

KIRINYAGA	6	**Mike Resnick**
THE AUDITION (a short play)	42	**Thomas M. Disch**
TRUDGING TO EDEN	76	**Kim Antieau**
TRAVELER, TRAVELER, SEEK YOUR WIFE IN THE FORESTS OF THIS LIFE	123	**Brian W. Aldiss**

DEPARTMENTS

BOOKS	28	**Algis Budrys**
BOOKS TO LOOK FOR	36	**Orson Scott Card**
INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION	93	**Charles Platt**
SCIENCE: Out of the Everywhere	129	**Isaac Asimov**

CARTOONS: HENRY MARTIN (26), S. HARRIS (75)

COVER BY JILL BAUMAN FOR "KIRINYAGA"

EDWARD L. FERMAN, Editor & Publisher
ISAAC ASIMOV, Science Columnist
CHERYL HOPF, Circulation Manager
AUDREY FERMAN, Assistant Publisher
ALGIS BUDRYS, Book Review Editor
ANNE JORDAN, Managing Editor
Assistant Editors: SUSAN FOX, DAVID MICHAEL BUSKUS

The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction (ISSN: 0024-984X), Volume 75, No. 5, Whole No. 450, Nov. 1988. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc. at $2.00 per copy. Annual subscription $21.00; $26.00 outside of the U.S. (Canadian subscribers: please remit in U.S. dollars or add 30%.) Postmaster: send form 3579 to Fantasy and Science Fiction, Box 56 Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Second class postage paid at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 1988 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Mike Resnick's new story is about the power of tradition in the far future; its hero is a witch doctor of sorts, but one who uses a computer. The story will appear in 1989 in an anthology titled EUTOPIA, edited by Orson Scott Card, about a number of Utopian colonies that are established on terraformed asteriods.

Kirinyaga

By Mike Resnick

IN THE BEGINNING, Ngai lived alone atop the mountain called Kirinyaga. In the fullness of time, he created three sons, who became fathers of the Masai, the Kamba, and the Kikuyu races; and to each son he offered a spear, a bow, and a digging stick. The Masai chose the spear, and was told to tend herds on the vast savanna. The Kamba chose the bow, and was sent to the dense forests to hunt for game. But Gikuyu, the first Kikuyu, knew that Ngai loved the earth and the seasons, and chose the digging stick. To reward him for this, Ngai not only taught him the secrets of the seed and the harvest, but gave him Kirinyaga, with its holy fig tree and rich lands.

The sons and daughters of Gikuyu remained on Kirinyaga until the white man came and took their lands away; and even when the white man had been banished, they did not return, but chose to remain in the cities, wearing Western clothes and using Western machines and living Western lives. Even I, who am a *mundumugu* — a witch doctor — was born in the

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

city. I have never seen the lion or the elephant or the rhinoceros, for all of them were extinct before my birth; nor have I seen Kirinyaga as Ngai meant it to be seen, for a bustling, overcrowded city of 3 million inhabitants covers its slopes, every year approaching closer and closer to Ngai's throne at the summit. Even the Kikuyu have forgotten its true name, and now know it only as Mount Kenya.

To be thrown out of Paradise, as were the Christian Adam and Eve, is a terrible fate, but to live beside a debased Paradise is infinitely worse. I think about them frequently, the descendants of Gikuyu who have forgotten their origin and their traditions and are now merely Kenyans, and I wonder why more of them did not join with us when we created the Eutopian world of Kirinyaga.

True, it is a harsh life, for Ngai never meant life to be easy; but it is also a satisfying life. We live in harmony with our environment; we offer sacrifices when Ngai's tears of compassion fall upon our fields and give sustenance to our crops; we slaughter a goat to thank him for the harvest.

Our pleasures are simple: a gourd of *pombe* to drink, the warmth of a *boma* when the sun has gone down, the wail of a newborn son or daughter, the footraces and spear throwing and other contests, the nightly singing and dancing.

Maintenance watches Kirinyaga discreetly, making minor orbital adjustments when necessary, assuring that our tropical climate remains constant. From time to time they have subtly suggested that we might wish to draw upon their medical expertise, or perhaps allow our children to make use of their educational facilities, but they have taken our refusal with good grace, and have never shown any desire to interfere in our affairs.

Until I strangled the baby.

It was less than an hour later that Koinnage, our paramount chief, sought me out.

"That was an unwise thing to do, Koriba," he said grimly.

"It was not a matter of choice," I replied. "You know that."

"Of course you had a choice," he responded. "You could have let the infant live." He paused, trying to control his anger and his fear. "Maintenance has never set foot on Kirinyaga before, but now they will come."

"Let them," I said with a shrug. "No law has been broken."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"We have killed a baby," he replied. "They will come, and they will revoke our charter!"

I shook my head. "No one will revoke our charter."

"Do not be too certain of that, Koriba," he warned me. "You can bury a goat alive, and they will monitor us and shake their heads and speak contemptuously among themselves about our religion. You can leave the aged and the infirm out for the hyenas to eat, and they will look upon us with disgust and call us godless heathens. But I tell you that killing a newborn infant is another matter. They will not sit idly by; they will come."

"If they do, I shall explain why I killed it," I replied calmly.

"They will not accept your answers," said Koinnage. "They will not understand."

"They will have no choice but to accept my answers," I said. "This is Kirinyaga, and they are not permitted to interfere."

"They will find a way," he said with an air of certainty. "We must apologize and tell them that it will not happen again."

"We will not apologize," I said sternly. "Nor can we promise that it will not happen again."

"Then, as paramount chief, *I* will apologize."

I stared at him for a long moment, then shrugged. "Do what you must do," I said.

Suddenly I could see the terror in his eyes.

"What will you do to me?" he asked fearfully.

"I? Nothing at all," I said. "Are you not my chief?" As he relaxed, I added: "But if I were you, I would beware of insects."

"Insects?" he repeated. "Why?"

"Because the next insect that bites you, be it spider or mosquito or fly, will surely kill you," I said. "Your blood will boil within your body, and your bones will melt. You will want to scream out your agony, yet you will be unable to utter a sound." I paused. "It is not a death I would wish on a friend," I added seriously.

"Are we not friends, Koriba?" he said, his ebon face turning an ash gray.

"I thought we were," I said. "But my friends honor our traditions. They do not apologize for them to the white man."

"I will not apologize!" he promised fervently. He spat on both his hands as a gesture of his sincerity.

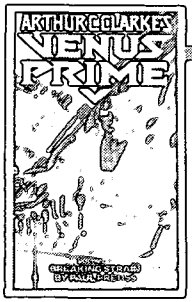
I opened one of the pouches I kept around my waist and withdrew

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The second in the spectacular series of science fiction thrillers evolving from the work of bestselling mastermind, Arthur C. Clarke!

ARTHUR C. CLARKE'S VENUS PRIME

CODE NAME: SPARTA
Her beauty veils a mysterious past and abilities of superhuman dimension. Her second, most challenging mission, is about to begin...



The first volume in the revolutionary series—hailed by The Chicago Sun-Times as a "combination of mystery and science fiction and almost reaching the level of Isaac Asimov's classic Lije Baley—R.Daneel Olivaw novels."

VOLUME 2
MAELSTROM
BY PAUL PREUSS

When a team of scientists is trapped in the gaseous inferno of Venus, Sparta must risk her life to save them, unaware that her actions will help recover a mysterious alien artifact. This artifact may provide galaxy shattering evidence of the existence of life on another planet, and the truth to Sparta's own identity.

The adventure continues in this gripping saga which brings together the creative genius of Arthur C. Clarke, and the talents of Paul Preuss, acclaimed author of Starfire!

Available now in paperback $3.95 $4.95 in Canada

Includes the unique NEOPAL technical blue print, by Darrell Anderson, detailing the world and structure of VENUS PRIME!

A Byron Preiss Book

AVON BOOKS

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a small polished stone, from the shore of our nearby river. "Wear this around your neck," I said, handing it to him, "and it shall protect you from the bites of insects."

"Thank you, Koriba!" he said with sincere gratitude, and another crisis had been averted.

We spoke about the affairs of the village for a few more minutes, and finally he left me. I sent for Wambu, the infant's mother, and led her through the ritual of purification, so that she might conceive again. I also gave her an ointment to relieve the pain in her breasts, since they were heavy with milk. Then I sat down by the fire before my *boma* and made myself available to my people, settling disputes over the ownership of chickens and goats, and supplying charms against demons, and instructing my people in the ancient ways.

By the time of the evening meal, no one had a thought for the dead baby. I ate alone in my *boma*, as befitted my status, for the *mundumugu* always lives and eats apart from his people. When I had finished, I wrapped a blanket around my body to protect me from the cold and walked down the dirt path to where all the other *bomas* were clustered. The cattle and goats and chickens were penned up for the night, and my people, who had slaughtered and eaten a cow, were now singing and dancing and drinking great quantities of *pombe*. As they made way for me, I walked over to the caldron and took a drink of *pombe*, and then, at Kanjara's request, I slit open a goat and read its entrails and saw that his youngest wife would soon conceive, which was cause for more celebration. Finally the children urged me to tell them a story.

"But not a story of Earth," complained one of the taller boys. "We hear those all the time. This must be a story about Kirinyaga."

"All right," I said. "If you will all gather around, I will tell you a story of Kirinyaga." The youngsters all moved closer. "This," I said, "is the story of the Lion and the Hare." I paused until I was sure that I had everyone's attention, especially that of the adults. "A hare was chosen by his people to be sacrificed to a lion, so that the lion would not bring disaster to their village. The hare might have run away, but he knew that sooner or later the lion would catch him, so instead he sought out the lion and walked right up to him, and as the lion opened his mouth to swallow him, the hare said, 'I apologize, Great Lion.'

"'For what?' asked the lion curiously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"'Because I am such a small meal,' answered the hare. 'For that reason, I brought honey for you as well.'

"'I see no honey,' said the lion.

"'That is why I apologized,' answered the hare. 'Another lion stole it from me. He is a ferocious creature, and says that he is not afraid of you.'

"The lion rose to his feet. 'Where is this other lion?' he roared.

"The hare pointed to a hole in the earth. 'Down there,' he said, 'but he will not give you back your honey.'

"'We shall see about that!' growled the lion.

"He jumped into the hole, roaring furiously, and was never seen again, for the hare had chosen a very deep hole indeed. Then the hare went home to his people and told them that the lion would never bother them again."

Most of the children laughed and clapped their hands in delight, but the same young boy voiced his objection.

"That is not a story of Kirinyaga," he said scornfully. "We have no lions here."

"It *is* a story of Kirinyaga," I replied. "What is important about the story is not that it concerned a lion and a hare, but that it shows that the weaker can defeat the stronger if he uses his intelligence."

"What has that to do with Kirinyaga?" asked the boy.

"What if we pretend that the men of Maintenance, who have ships and weapons, are the lion, and the Kikuyu are the hares?" I suggested. "What shall the hares do if the lion demands a sacrifice?"

The boy suddenly grinned. "Now I understand! We shall throw the lion down a hole!"

"But we have no holes here," I pointed out.

"Then what shall we do?"

"The hare did not know that he would find the lion near a hole," I replied. "Had he found him by a deep lake, he would have said that a large fish took the honey."

"We have no deep lakes."

"But we do have intelligence," I said. "And if Maintenance ever interferes with us, we will use our intelligence to destroy the lion of Maintenance, just as the hare used his intelligence to destroy the lion of the fable."

"Let us think how to destroy Maintenance right now!" cried the boy. He picked up a stick and brandished it at an imaginary lion as if it were a spear and he a great hunter.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I shook my head. "The hare does not hunt the lion, and the Kikuyu do not make war. The hare merely protects himself, and the Kikuyu do the same."

"Why would Maintenance interfere with us?" asked another boy, pushing his way to the front of the group. "They are our friends."

"Perhaps they will not," I answered reassuringly. "But you must always remember that the Kikuyu have no true friends except themselves."

"Tell us another story, Koriba!" cried a young girl.

"I am an old man," I said. "The night has turned cold, and I must sleep."

"Tomorrow?" she asked. "Will you tell us another tomorrow?"

I smiled. "Ask me tomorrow, after all the fields are planted and the cattle and goats are in their enclosures and the food has been made and the fabrics have been woven."

"But girls do not herd the cattle and goats," she protested. "What if my brothers do not bring all their animals to the enclosure?"

"Then I will tell a story just to the girls," I said.

"It must be a long story," she insisted seriously, "for we work much harder than the boys."

"I will watch you in particular, little one," I replied, "and the story will be as long or as short as your work merits."

The adults all laughed, and suddenly she looked very uncomfortable, but then I chuckled and hugged her and patted her head, for it was necessary that the children learn to love their *mundumugu* as well as hold him in awe, and finally she ran off to play and dance with the other girls, while I retired to my *boma*.

Once inside, I activated my computer and discovered that a message was waiting for me from Maintenance, informing me that one of their number would be visiting me the following morning. I made a very brief reply — "Article II, Paragraph 5," which is the ordinance forbidding intervention — and lay down on my sleeping blanket, letting the rhythmic chanting of the singers carry me off to sleep.

I AWOKE WITH the sun the next morning and instructed my computer to let me know when the Maintenance ship had landed. Then I inspected my cattle and my goats — I, alone of my people, planted no crops, for the Kikuyu feed their *mundumugu*, just as they tend his herds and weave his blankets and keep his *boma* clean — and stopped by Simani's *boma* to deliver a balm to fight the disease that was afflicting

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

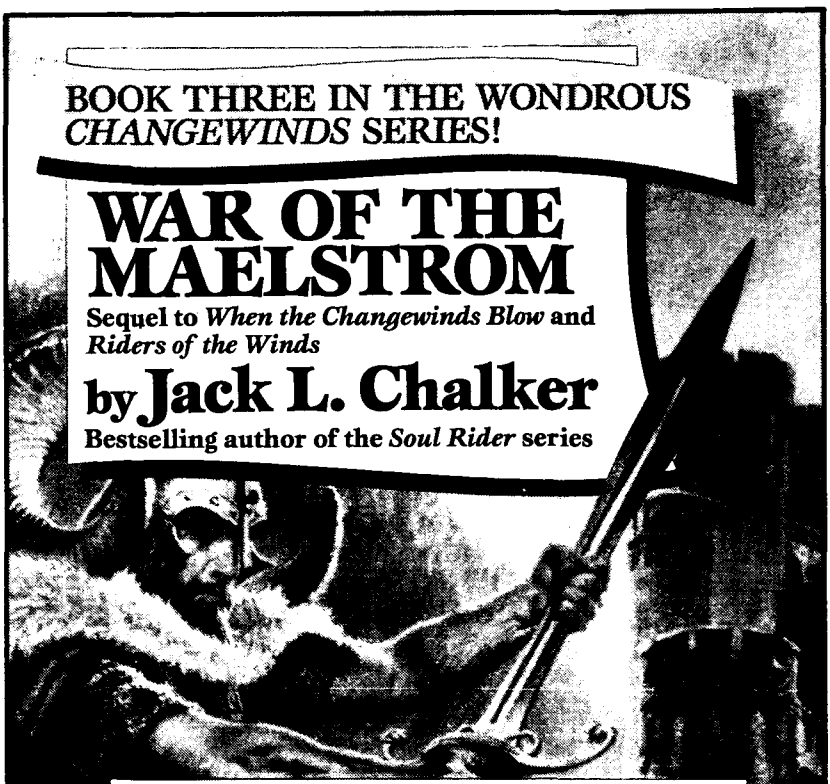
BOOK THREE IN THE WONDROUS
CHANGEWINDS SERIES!

WAR OF THE MAELSTROM

Sequel to *When the Changewinds Blow* and *Riders of the Winds*

by Jack L. Chalker

Bestselling author of the *Soul Rider* series



"A powerful storyteller." – Orson Scott Card,
Washington Post Book World

The magic of the Changewinds is about to fall into the destructive hands of Klittichorn, the horned demon...unless the sorcerers of Akahlar can defeat him. In the swirling, deadly heart of the Changewinds, the ultimate war begins!
$3.95

ACE OCTOBER

THE #1 PUBLISHER OF SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his joints. Then, as the sun began warming the earth, I returned to my own *boma*, skirting the pastures where the young men were tending their animals. When I arrived, I knew the ship had landed, for I found the droppings of a hyena on the ground near my hut, and that is the surest sign of a curse.

I learned what I could from the computer, then walked outside and scanned the horizon while two naked children took turns chasing a small dog and running away from it. When they began frightening my chickens, I gently sent them back to their own *boma*, and then seated myself beside my fire. At last I saw my visitor from Maintenance, coming up the path from Haven. She was obviously uncomfortable in the heat, and she slapped futilely at the flies that circled her head. Her blonde hair was starting to turn gray, and I could tell by the ungainly way she negotiated the steep, rocky path that she was unused to such terrain. She almost lost her balance a number of times, and it was obvious that her proximity to so many animals frightened her, but she never slowed her pace, and within another ten minutes she stood before me.

"Good morning," she said.

"*Jambo, Memsaab,*" I replied.

"You are Koriba, are you not?"

I briefly studied the face of my enemy; middle-aged and weary, it did not appear formidable. "I am Koriba," I replied.

"Good," she said. "My name is—"

"I know who you are," I said, for it is best, if conflict cannot be avoided, to take the offensive.

"You do?"

I pulled the bones out of my pouch and cast them on the dirt. "You are Barbara Eaton, born of Earth," I intoned, studying her reactions as I picked up the bones and cast them again. "You are married to Robert Eaton, and you have worked for Maintenance for nine years." A final cast of the bones. "You are forty-one years old, and you are barren."

"How did you know all that?" she asked with an expression of surprise.

"Am I not the *mundumugu*?"

She stared at me for a long minute. "You read my biography on your computer," she concluded at last.

"As long as the facts are correct, what difference does it make whether I read them from the bones or the computer?" I responded, refusing to

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

confirm her statement. "Please sit down, *Memsaab* Eaton."

She lowered herself awkwardly to the ground, wrinkling her face as she raised a cloud of dust.

"It's very hot," she noted uncomfortably.

"It is very hot in Kenya," I replied.

"You could have created any climate you desired," she pointed out.

"We *did* create the climate we desired," I answered.

"Are there predators out there?" she asked, looking out over the savanna.

"A few," I replied.

"What kind?"

"Hyenas."

"Nothing larger?" she asked.

"There *is* nothing larger anymore," I said.

"I wonder why they didn't attack me?"

"Perhaps because you are an intruder," I suggested.

"Will they leave me alone on my way back to Haven?" she asked nervously, ignoring my comment.

"I will give you a charm to keep them away."

"I'd prefer an escort."

"Very well," I said.

"They're such ugly animals," she said with a shudder. "I saw them once when we were monitoring your world."

"They are very useful animals," I answered, "for they bring many omens, both good and bad."

"Really?"

I nodded. "A hyena left me an evil omen this morning."

"And?" she asked curiously.

"And here you are," I said.

She laughed. "They told me you were a sharp old man."

"They are mistaken," I replied. "I am a feeble old man who sits in front of his *boma* and watches younger men tend his cattle and goats."

"You are a feeble old man who graduated with honors from Cambridge and then acquired two postgraduate degrees from Yale," she replied.

"Who told you that?"

She smiled. "You're not the only one who reads biographies."

I shrugged. "My degrees did not help me become a better *mundumugu*," I said. "The time was wasted."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Imagine having the power of life and death over an entire Eutopian world!"

"You keep using that word. What, exactly, *is* a *mundumugu*?"

"You would call him a witch doctor," I answered. "But in truth the *mundumugu*, while he occasionally casts spells and interprets omens, is more a repository of the collected wisdom and traditions of his race."

"It sounds like an interesting occupation," she said.

"It is not without its compensations."

"And *such* compensations!" she said with false enthusiasm as a goat bleated in the distance and a young man yelled at it in Swahili. "Imagine having the power of life and death over an entire Eutopian world!"

So now it comes, I thought. Aloud I said: "It is not a matter of exercising power, *Memsaab* Eaton, but of maintaining traditions."

"I rather doubt that," she said bluntly.

"Why should you doubt what I say?" I asked.

"Because if it were traditional to kill newborn infants, the Kikuyu would have died out after a single generation."

"If the slaying of the infant arouses your disapproval," I said calmly, "I am surprised Maintenance has not previously asked about our custom of leaving the old and the feeble out for the hyenas."

"We know that the elderly and the infirm have consented to your treatment of them, much as we may disapprove of it," she replied. "We also know that a newborn infant could not possibly consent to its own death." She paused, staring at me. "May I ask why this particular baby was killed?"

"That *is* why you have come here, is it not?"

"I have been sent here to evaluate the situation," she replied, brushing an insect from her cheek and shifting her position on the ground. "A newborn child was killed. We would like to know why."

I shrugged. "It was killed because it was born with a terrible *thahu* upon it."

She frowned. "A *thahu*? What is that?"

"A curse."

"Do you mean that it was deformed?" she asked.

"It was not deformed."

"Then what was this curse that you refer to?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It was born feetfirst," I said.

"That's it?" she asked, surprised. "That's the curse?"

"Yes."

"It was murdered simply because it came out feetfirst?"

"It is not murder to put a demon to death," I explained patiently. "Our tradition tells us that a child born in this manner is actually a demon."

"You are an educated man, Koriba," she said. "How can you kill a perfectly healthy infant and blame it on some primitive tradition?"

"You must never underestimate the power of tradition, *Memsaab* Eaton," I said. "The Kikuyu turned their backs on their traditions once; the result is a mechanized, impoverished, overcrowded country that is no longer populated by Kikuyu, or Masai, or Luo, or Wakamba, but by a new, artificial tribe known only as Kenyans. We here on Kirinyaga are true Kikuyu, and we will not make that mistake again. If the rains are late, a ram must be sacrificed. If a man's veracity is questioned, he must undergo the ordeal of the *githani* tribe. If an infant is born with a *thahu* upon it, it must be put to death."

"Then you intend to continue killing any children that are born feetfirst?" she asked.

"That is correct," I responded.

A drop of sweat rolled down her face as she looked directly at me and said: "I don't know what Maintenance's reaction will be."

"According to our charter, Maintenance is not permitted to interfere with us," I reminded her.

"It's not that simple, Koriba," she said. "According to your charter, any member of your community who wishes to leave your world is allowed free passage to Haven, from which he or she can board a ship to Earth." She paused. "Was that baby you killed given such a choice?"

"I did not kill a baby, but a demon," I replied, turning my head slightly as a hot breeze stirred up the dust around us.

She waited until the breeze died down, then coughed before speaking. "You do understand that not everyone in Maintenance may share that opinion?"

"What Maintenance thinks is of no concern to us," I said.

"When innocent children are murdered, what Maintenance thinks is of supreme importance to you," she responded. "I am sure you do not want to defend your practices in the Eutopian Court."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Are you here to evaluate the situation, as you said, or to threaten us?" I asked calmly.

"To evaluate the situation," she replied. "But there seems to be only one conclusion that I can draw from the facts that you have presented to me."

"Then you have not been listening to me," I said, briefly closing my eyes as another, stronger, breeze swept past us.

"Koriba, I know that Kirinyaga was created so that you could emulate the ways of your forefathers — but surely you must see the difference between the torture of animals as a religious ritual and the murder of a human baby."

I shook my head. "They are one and the same," I replied. "We cannot change our way of life because it makes *you* uncomfortable. We did that once before, and within a mere handful of years, your culture had corrupted our society. With every factory we built, with every job we created, with every bit of Western technology we accepted, with every Kikuyu who converted to Christianity, we became something we were not meant to be." I stared directly into her eyes. "I am the *mundumugu*, entrusted with preserving all that makes us Kikuyu, and I will not allow that to happen again."

"There are alternatives," she said.

"Not for the Kikuyu," I replied adamantly.

"There *are*," she insisted, so intent upon what she had to say that she paid no attention to a black-and-gold centipede that crawled over her boot. "For example, years spent in space can cause certain physiological and hormonal changes in humans. You noted when I arrived that I am forty-one years old and childless. That is true. In fact, many of the women in Maintenance are childless. If you will turn the babies over to us, I am sure we can find families for them. This would effectively remove them from your society without the necessity of killing them. I could speak to my superiors about it; I think that there is an excellent chance that they would approve."

"That is a thoughtful and innovative suggestion, *Memsaab* Eaton," I said truthfully. "I am sorry that I must reject it."

"But why?" she demanded.

"Because the first time we betray our traditions, this world will cease to be Kirinyaga, and will become merely another Kenya, a nation of men awkwardly pretending to be something they are not."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I could speak to Koinnage and the other chiefs about it," she suggested meaningfully.

"They will not disobey my instructions," I replied confidently.

"You hold that much power?"

"I hold that much respect," I answered. "A chief may enforce the law, but it is the *mundumugu* who interprets it."

"Then let us consider other alternatives."

"No."

"I am trying to avoid a conflict between Maintenance and your people," she said, her voice heavy with frustration. "It seems to me that you could at least make the effort to meet me halfway."

"I do not question your motives, *Memsaab* Eaton," I replied, "but you are an intruder representing an organization that has no legal right to interfere with our culture. We do not impose our religion or our morality upon Maintenance, and Maintenance may not impose its religion or morality upon us."

"It is not that simple."

"It is precisely that simple," I said.

"That is your last word on the subject?" she asked.

"Yes."

She stood up. "Then I think it is time for me to leave and make my report."

I stood up as well, and a shift in the wind brought the odors of the village: the scent of bananas, the smell of a fresh caldron of *pombe*, even the pungent odor of a bull that had been slaughtered that morning.

"As you wish, *Memsaab* Eaton," I said. "I will arrange for your escort." I signaled to a small boy who was tending three goats and instructed him to go to the village and send back two young men.

"Thank you," she said. "I know it's an inconvenience, but I just don't feel safe with hyenas roaming loose out there."

"You are welcome," I said. "Perhaps, while we are waiting for the men who will accompany you, you would like to hear a story about the hyena."

She shuddered involuntarily. "They are such ugly beasts!" she said distastefully. "Their hind legs seem almost deformed." She shook her head. "No, I don't think I'd be interested in hearing a story about a hyena."

"You will be interested in *this* story," I told her.

She stared at me curiously and shrugged. "All right," she said. "Go ahead."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"It is true that hyenas are deformed, ugly animals," I began, "but once, a long time ago, they were as lovely and graceful as the impala. Then one day a Kikuyu chief gave a hyena a young goat to take as a gift to Ngai, who lived atop the holy mountain Kirinyaga. The hyena took the goat between his powerful jaws and headed toward the distant mountain — but on the way he passed a settlement filled with Europeans and Arabs. It abounded in guns and machines and other wonders he had never seen before, and he stopped to look, fascinated. Finally an Arab noticed him staring intently, and asked if he, too, would like to become a civilized man — and as he opened his mouth to say that he would, the goat fell to the ground and ran away. As the goat raced out of sight, the Arab laughed and explained that he was only joking, that of course no hyena could become a man." I paused for a moment, and then continued. "So the hyena proceeded to Kirinyaga, and when he reached the summit, Ngai asked him what had become of the goat. When the hyena told him, Ngai hurled him off the mountaintop for having the audacity to believe he could become a man. He did not die from the fall, but his rear legs were crippled, and Ngai declared that from that day forward, all hyenas would appear thus — and to remind them of the foolishness of trying to become something that they were not, he also gave them a fool's laugh." I paused again, and stared at her. "*Memsaab* Eaton, you do not hear the Kikuyu laugh like fools, and I will not let them become crippled like the hyena. Do you understand what I am saying?"

She considered my statement for a moment, then looked into my eyes. "I think we understand each other perfectly, Koriba," she said.

The two young men I had sent for arrived just then, and I instructed them to accompany her to Haven. A moment later they set off across the dry savanna, and I returned to my duties.

I began by walking through the fields, blessing the scarecrows. Since a number of the smaller children followed me, I rested beneath the trees more often than was necessary, and always, whenever we paused, they begged me to tell them more stories. I told them the tale of the Elephant and the Buffalo, and how the Masai *elmoran* cut the rainbow with his spear so that it never again came to rest upon the earth, and why the nine Kikuyu tribes are named after Gikuyu's nine daughters; and when the sun became too hot, I led them back to the village.

Then, in the afternoon, I gathered the older boys about me and explained once more how they must paint their faces and bodies for their

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

forthcoming circumcision ceremony. Ndemi, the boy who had insisted upon a story about Kirinyaga the night before, sought ne out privately to complain that he had been unable to slay a small gazelle with his spear, and asked for a charm to make its flight more accurate. I explained to him that there would come a day when he faced a buffalo or a hyena with no charm, and that he must practice more before he came to me again. He was one to watch, this little Ndemi, for he was impetuous and totally without fear; in the old days, he would have made a great warrior, but on Kirinyaga we had no warriors. If we remained fruitful and fecund, however, we would someday need more chiefs and even another *mundumugu*, and I made up my mind to observe him closely.

In the evening, after I ate my solitary meal, I returned to the village, for Njogu, one of our young men, was to marry Kamiri, a girl from the next village. The bride-price had been decided upon, and the two families were waiting for me to preside at the ceremony.

Njogu, his face streaked with paint, wore an ostrich-feather headdress, and looked very uneasy as he and his betrothed stood before me. I slit the throat of a fat ram that Kamiri's father had brought for the occasion, and then I turned to Njogu.

"What have you to say?" I asked.

He took a step forward. "I want Kamiri to come and till the fields of my *shamba*," he said, his voice cracking with nervousness as he spoke the prescribed words, "for I am a man, and I need a woman to tend to my *shamba* and dig deep around the roots of my plantings, that they may grow well and bring prosperity to my house."

He spit on both his hands to show his sincerity, and then, exhaling deeply with relief, he stepped back.

I turned to Kamiri.

"Do you consent to till the *shamba* of Njogu, son of Muchiri?" I asked her.

"Yes," she said softly, bowing her head. "I consent."

I held out my right hand, and the bride's mother placed a gourd of *pombe* in it.

"If this man does not please you," I said to Kamiri, "I will spill the *pombe* upon the ground."

"Do not spill it," she replied.

"Then drink," I said, handing the gourd to her.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She lifted it to her lips and took a swallow, then handed it to Njogu, who did the same.

When the gourd was empty, the parents of Njogu and Kamiri stuffed it with grass, signifying the friendship between the two clans.

Then a cheer rose from the onlookers, the ram was carried off to be roasted, more *pombe* appeared as if by magic, and while the groom took the bride off to his *boma*, the remainder of the people celebrated far into the night. They stopped only when the bleating of the goats told them that some hyenas were nearby, and then the women and children went off to their *bomas* while the men took their spears and went into the fields to frighten the hyenas away.

Koinnage came up to me as I was about to leave.

"Did you speak to the woman from Maintenance?" he asked.

"I did," I replied.

"What did she say?"

"She said that they do not approve of killing babies who are born feetfirst."

"And what did *you* say?" he asked nervously.

"I told her that we did not need the approval of Maintenance to practice our religion," I replied.

"Will Maintenance listen?"

"They have no choice," I said. "And *we* have no choice, either," I added. "Let them dictate one thing that we must or must not do, and soon they will dictate all things. Give them their way, and Njogu and Kamiri would have recited wedding vows from the Bible or the Koran. It happened to us in Kenya; we cannot permit it to happen on Kirinyaga."

"But they will not punish us?" he persisted.

"They will not punish us," I replied.

Satisfied, he walked off to his *boma* while I took the narrow, winding path to my own. I stopped by the enclosure where my animals were kept and saw that there were two new goats there, gifts from the bride's and groom's families in gratitude for my services. A few minutes later I was asleep within the walls of my own *boma*.

The computer woke me a few minutes before sunrise. I stood up, splashed my face with water from the gourd I keep by my sleeping blanket, and walked over to the terminal.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There was a message for me from Barbara Eaton, brief and to the point:

It is the preliminary finding of Maintenance that infanticide, for any reason, is a direct violation of Kirinyaga's charter. No action will be taken for past offenses.

We are also evaluating your practice of euthanasia, and may require further testimony from you at some point in the future.

Barbara Eaton

A runner from Koinnage arrived a moment later, asking me to attend a meeting of the Council of Elders, and I knew that he had received the same message.

I wrapped my blanket around my shoulders and began walking to Koinnage's *shamba,* which consisted of his *boma* as well as those of his three sons and their wives. When I arrived, I found not only the local elders waiting for me, but also two chiefs from neighboring villages.

"Did you receive the message from Maintenance?" demanded Koinnage, as I seated myself opposite him.

"I did."

"I warned you that this would happen!" he said. "What will we do now?"

"We will do what we have always done," I answered calmly.

"We cannot," said one of the neighboring chiefs. "They have forbidden it."

"They have no right to forbid it," I replied.

"There is a woman in my village whose time is near," continued the chief, "and all of the signs and omens point to the birth of twins. We have been taught that the firstborn must be killed, for one mother cannot produce two souls — but now Maintenance has forbidden it. What are we to do?"

"We must kill the firstborn," I said, "for it will be a demon."

"And then Maintenance will make us leave Kirinyaga!" said Koinnage bitterly.

"Perhaps we could let the child live," said the chief. "That might satisfy them, and then they might leave us alone."

I shook my head. "They will not leave you alone. Already they speak about the way we leave the old and feeble out for the hyenas, as if this were some enormous sin against their God. If you give in on the one, the day will come when you must give in on the other."

"Would that be so terrible?" persisted the chief. "They have medicines

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that we do not possess; perhaps they could make the old young again."

"You do not understand," I said, rising to my feet. "Our society is not a collection of separate people and customs and traditions. No, it is a complex system, with all the pieces as dependent upon each other as the animals and vegetation of the savanna. If you burn the grass, you will not only kill the impala who feeds upon it, but the predator who feeds upon the impala, and the ticks and flies who live upon the predator, and the vultures and maribou storks who feed upon his remains when he dies. You cannot destroy the part without destroying the whole."

I paused to let them consider what I had said, and then continued speaking: "Kirinyaga is like the savanna. If we do not leave the old and feeble out for the hyenas, the hyenas will starve. If the hyenas starve, the grass eaters will become so numerous that there is no land left for our cattle and goats to graze. If the old and feeble do not die when Ngai decrees it, then soon we will not have enough food to go around."

I picked up a stick and balanced it precariously on my forefinger.

"This stick," I said, "is the Kikuyu people, and my finger is Kirinyaga. They are in perfect balance." I stared at the neighboring chief. "But what will happen if I alter the balance and put my finger *here*!" I asked, gesturing to the end of the stick.

"The stick will fall to the ground."

"And here?" I asked, pointing to a stop an inch away from the center.

"It will fall."

"Thus is it with us," I explained. "Whether we yield on one point or all points, the result will be the same: the Kikuyu will fall as surely as the stick will fall. Have we learned nothing from our past? We *must* adhere to our traditions; they are all that we have!"

"But Maintenance will not allow us to do so!" protested Koinnage.

"They are not warriors, but civilized men," I said, allowing a touch of contempt to creep into my voice. "Their chiefs and their *mundumugus* will not send them to Kirinyaga with guns and spears. They will issue warnings and findings and declarations, and finally, when that fails, they will go to the Eutopian Court and plead their case, and the trial will be postponed many times and reheard many more times." I could see them finally relaxing, and I smiled confidently at them. "Each of you will have died from the burden of your years before Maintenance does anything other than talk. I am your *mundumugu*; I have lived among civilized

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

men, and I tell you that this is the truth."

The neighboring chief stood up and faced me. "I will send for you when the twins are born," he pledged.

"I will come," I promised him.

We spoke further, and then the meeting ended and the old men began wandering off to their *bomas,* while I looked to the future, which I could see more clearly than Koinnage or the elders.

I walked through the village until I found the bold young Ndemi, brandishing his spear and hurling it at a buffalo he had constructed out of dried grasses.

"*Jambo,* Koriba!" he greeted me.

"*Jambo,* my brave young warrior," I replied.

"I have been practicing, as you ordered."

"I thought you wanted to hunt the gazelle," I noted.

"Gazelles are for children," he answered. "I will slay *mbogo,* the buffalo."

"*Mbogo* may feel differently about it," I said.

"So much the better," he said confidently. "I have no wish to kill an animal as it runs away from me."

"And when will you go out to slay the fierce *mbogo*?"

He shrugged. "When I am more accurate." He smiled up at me. "Perhaps tomorrow."

I stared at him thoughtfully for a moment, and then spoke: "Tomorrow is a long time away. We have business tonight."

"What business?" he asked.

"You must find ten friends, none of them yet of circumcision age, and tell them to come to the pond within the forest to the south. They must come after the sun has set, and you must tell them that Koriba the *mundumugu* commands that they tell no one, not even their parents, that they are coming." I paused. "Do you understand, Ndemi?"

"I understand."

"Then go," I said. "Take my message to them."

He retrieved his spear from the straw buffalo and set off at a trot, young and tall and strong and fearless.

You are the future, I thought, as I watched him run toward the village. *Not Koinnage, not myself, not even the young bridegroom Njogu, for their time will have come and gone before the battle is joined. It is you, Ndemi,*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

upon whom Kirinyaga must depent if it is to survive.

Once before, the Kikuyu had to fight for their freedom. Under the leadership of Jomo Kenyatta, whose name has been forgotten by most of your parents, we took the terrible oath of Mau Mau, and we maimed and we killed and we committed such atrocities that finally we achieved Uhuru, for against such butchery, civilized men have no defense but to depart.

And tonight, young Ndemi, while your parents are asleep, you and your companions will meet me deep in the woods, and you in your turn and they in theirs will learn one last tradition of the Kikuyu, for I will invoke not only the strength of Ngai but also the indomitable spirit of Jomo Kenyatta. I will administer a hideous oath and force you to do unspeakable things to prove her fealty, and I will teach each of you, in turn, how to administer the oath to those who come after you.

There is a season for all things: for birth, for growth, for death. There is unquestionably a season for Utopia, but it will have to wait.

For the season of Uhuru is upon us.

"Oh, dear, Willard, I had hoped your soul would rest in peace."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The series that's fantasy incarnate!

Nature Lover...

Orb, the daughter of Fate, had magic in her; none could resist the lure of her music.

But Orb could not resist a man named Natasha. All was lovely between them until Orb was chosen to be the Incarnation of Nature, the Green Mother... and prophecy said Orb would marry Evil...

Finally in Paperback $4.95

On Sale in October

BEING A GREEN MOTHER

Book Five of *Incarnations of Immortality*

PIERS ANTHONY

DEL REY #1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy Published by Ballantine Books

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS

ALGIS BUDRYS

Druid's Blood. Esther M. Friesner Signet, $3.50

Resurrection, Inc, Kevin J. Anderson Signet, $3.50

LAST TIME, we were talking about alternate-reality stories, and, by Mithra, that turns out not to have been the end of it, as you shall see. But actually, this time we are talking about kinds of writing, again, and to do that usefully I have to have something to push against. I figure Esther Friesner, who has had hassles before in her life, thus can stand up to a certain amount of horse-pulling on my part, and Kevin Anderson's a tough guy anyhow. Besides, who knows if I'm going to say anything actually painful in the course of intending to just be objective? Anyhow. . . .

Long ago and far away, every SF novel that came along was presumed to be a significant rung on the ladder of one's career. If not so presumed by the author, so presumed by the readers. And usually so presumed by the author, because one didn't write very many of them. And it was a cinch bet everyone interested in SF would read it, so one wrote with a certain awareness of all those people looking over one's shoulder. This was back in the Good Old Days, when all the actual novels were written by Mainstreamy types, for mainstreamy publishers, and all the other book-length work appeared in the form of magazine serials, with damned few magazines publishing same.*

I don't know that the authors of the serials thought of their work in quite the way I think I would have. But it seems tenable to propose that since the SF reader-community at that time was one small family,

**We speak of the Golden Age,* circa *1938-1948, though it was in about 1954 that, for the first time, a serial was still running in* Astounding *when Ace Books got the complete version out on the bookracks next to it. John Campbell spoke of it to me at the time with the shock of a man whose child has run off to join the circus.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and the total of new SF produced each month was small enough so that everyone could read everything, there was some consciousness that just about every person one met at the club gathering or at the next con could be ready to comment on your work.

Certainly, the total number of your professional peers was small enough so you could be almighty sure *they'd* drop a word or two about it next night at the watering hole, and would see no reason to be polite about gaffes. So I think that, one reason being put with another, much of the booklength SF work being done at mid-century was done with half an eye toward getting it pretty close to the highest community standards if time and circumstance gave you any chance to.

You know, the assumption was that a person might produce as many as a dozen novel-length works over the course of a career. And careers were few. So each new book was examined as a major step in a given author's development, and every new development in one of the few authors was evaluated for its effect on the development of the field — which, not paradoxically, was a development which thus proceeded much faster than it does today, and certainly along a much more readily charted line of march.

This orientation went so deep many of us — even us young sprouts who broke in around 1951 or '52 *et immediate seq.*, when many of the old serials had surfaced in hardcover form during the post-War boom in specialty SF publishing — this orientation was in our bones and gray matter like Strontium 90, and to this day I notice that I still work with certain people looking over my shoulder, and tend to write reviews as if particular books and careers *mattered* to some discrete and worthy entity called SF. But this is sentimental nonsense, though I shall very probably cling to it.

For the publishers of *Astounding*, and for those of *Galaxy* and *Science Fiction Adventures*, the serials were just product, true.* But for most writers and most readers, they were as described above. To-

*Astounding *(and* Unknown *with it) were the only consistent source of serials until* Galaxy *came along, whereon there was a publishing boomlet that included the launching of the* Science Fiction Adventures *edited by Lester del Rey.* F&SF, *appearing prior to* Galaxy, *certainly contributed to the idea that there was a noteworthy SF-magazine market, but as far as I recall never published a serial written especially for it. Most SF magazines never published serials; even* Space, *Lester's more seriously-intended magazine, didn't until it got hold of T.L. Sherred's first story after "E for Effort" and did it as a two-parter . . . but that wasn't purpose-written either.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

day, I don't know how it is for most readers, but I do know it's the same for many writers as it is for all publishers, and publishers do not change. It's just product.

This isn't either bad or good *per se*. You can write product to high standards, and a thoroughly product-oriented environment demonstrably doesn't preclude writers and work with much more serious-constructive bases.

But it is what there is, and among other things it means there is enough wordage out there to swamp even the most dedicated reader. Which in turn means that readers, including literary arbiters, pick and choose what they read, which means the perceived line of SF's progress varies from arbiter to arbiter, and no one can hope to have *the* accurate concept of what this field even is.

Which means that young writers don't have a target. And that's a crucial difference. They have idols, they have models, they have mentors and they have an idea of a horizon-line they must cross, but they don't have a single place to aim to stand on.

Now consider that *Astounding* and *Unknown* embodied essentially one man's idea of what speculative fiction should be, and by sheer weight imposed that idea on what market there was. *F&SF* and *Galaxy* when they began were essentially embodiments of clearcut disagreements with that one man by a sharply defined small group of people — Horace Gold, and Tony Boucher & Mick McComas, to be exact — and what you see is that every significant piece of work done at mid-century required its author to take thought to a specific orthodoxy of SF or a heretical version based on it, so that even if he — almost always he — wanted to write something just for the money, some element of sercon thought had to be inherent in it. To at least that extent, everyone in the Golden Age or in times heavily influenced by it was a target writer. Today, the horizon-line writer is totally free to just think about product marketing, which is all any of the publishers are forced to think about and a very large part of what the editors think about.

Even today's target writers have to provide their own target, which means that there is no target writer who does not have a heavy component of horizon-line writer.*

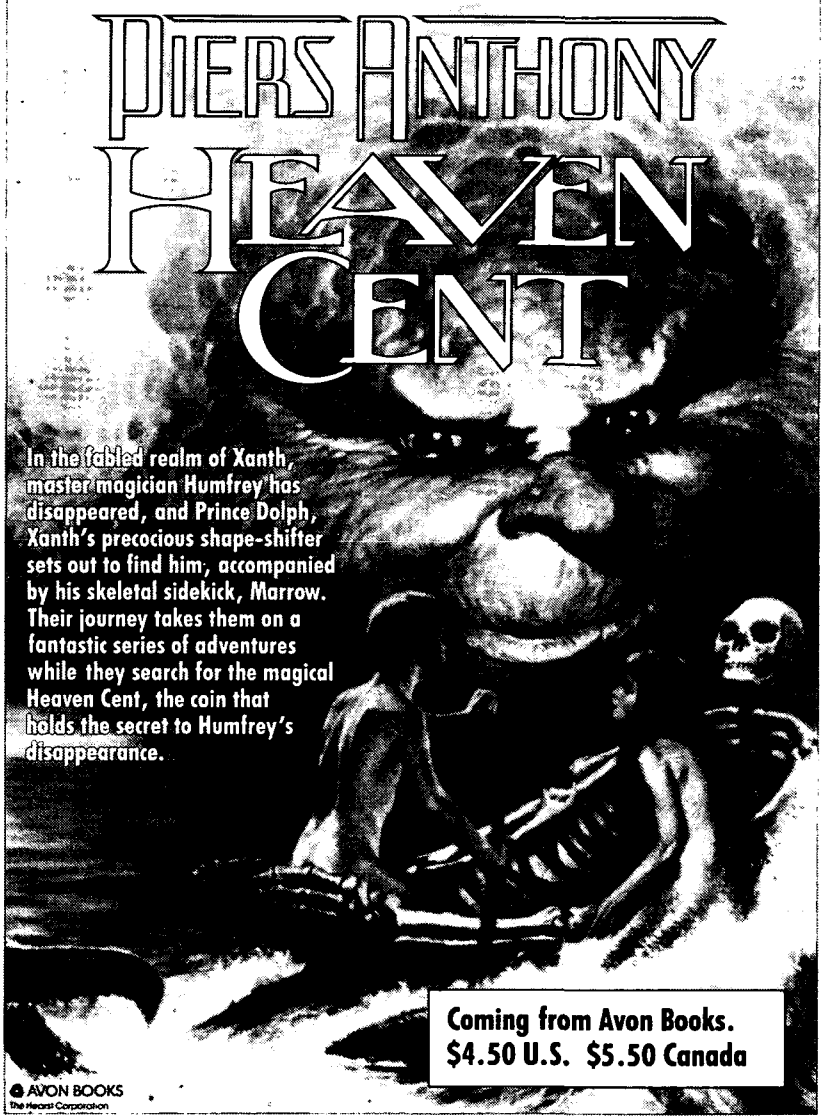
**Putting it another way, the world has turned upside-down, or, at the very least, we have an explanation for the recent intensity, in some quarters, of the urge to publish manifestoes and to measure art against proclaimed doctrine.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The newest novel from the world of Xanth!

The sequel to Piers Anthony's *Vale of the Vole*, the incredible *New York Times* bestseller!

PIERS ANTHONY
HEAVEN CENT



In the fabled realm of Xanth, master magician Humfrey has disappeared, and Prince Dolph, Xanth's precocious shape-shifter sets out to find him, accompanied by his skeletal sidekick, Marrow. Their journey takes them on a fantastic series of adventures while they search for the magical Heaven Cent, the coin that holds the secret to Humfrey's disappearance.

Coming from Avon Books.
$4.50 U.S. $5.50 Canada

AVON BOOKS
The Hearst Corporation

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All right, what *is* the best kind of horizon-line writing?

Ah, that's a tough one. Probably, it's the writing that comes easiest to the cleverest minds, and that brings us back to the Esther Friesners.

Esther Friesner has a Yale doctorate, presumably not in SF writing or any other kind of writing, and certain other guesses can be made about her. For example, Yale boasts of producing "A thousand new male leaders a year," which immediately tells you something about the special resourcefulness Friesner had to bring into play. So, a clever mind.

And clever writing. *Druid's Blood* presumes an England in which neither the Roman pantheon nor Christianity ever displaced the Druids, and Queen Victoria presides over the annual Beltane orgy with all the vim and dedication required. Furthermore, magic works, throughout the world, with the Druid heritage holding sway in Britain under a system codified in the Rules Britannia. The Iron Duke, of Wellington, is the Arch-Druid, George Gordon, Lord Byron ("Call me Geordie — I insist") is the hapless pawn of his nasty wife who is in turn under the sway of a monstrous conspiracy directed at control of England and more, and the Rules have disappeared just when Victoria wanted to find out if some loophole in them would allow Dr. John Weston to be made her royal consort.

Weston, you should know, aside from being swarthily handsome, is a frequent contributor to the *Strand* magazine, in which he chronicles the adventures of his condescending friend, Brihtric Donne, consulting detective. (But "Donne," in turn, is actually an actor who was much taken with Weston's fiction. In some mystical way he has caused the whole situation to become "real," departing the American stage in a manner that caused Sarah Bernhart to recite Hamlet's soliloquy in the nude.)

Quips and japes run riot over Friesner's pages, many of them on the surface, many others of them fully appreciable only to persons educated enough to detect the cream of jests based on a thorough grounding in the Humanities.

She runs the full range from cow-pat jokes on up to the most delicately pointed literary and historical allusions, constantly lacing-in a cheeky prurience suitable to persons of all degrees of intellectual attainment. The book is a delight. I am also told that she writes very quickly, and that there is a lot of Friesner out and more due out, which, on the basis of this sample, is excellent news.

This is clever work on the page

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and in the sales meeting. What in the world Signet was thinking about, not showing Victoria on the cover, I don't know; neither does the blurbing more than glancingly indicate what's really inside, while the package as a whole tries its damnably static best to make you think it's just another one of those Sherlock Holmes pastiches.

Now, what effect will this book have on the SF community's awareness of Friesner, or on the development of SF? Essentially, zilch. Of the total of its potential appreciators, how many will find it, and what percentage of all SF readers do they constitute? [And did Signet, in sending out whatever advance galleys they provided, make any successful attempt to acquaint reviewers with the unique flavor of Friesner's work? They did not; they made a determined effort to make it seem hum-drum, and as a consequence this review, done from a production copy, will find the racks bare of it by the time you read this.]

Zilch, I was saying, because somehow Signet in years past learned nothing from Ace, or Bantam or Tor, where the SF-literature mavens look for the new talent, let alone DAW, which is another relative of New American Library and where the Wollheims have persistently demonstrated how stars are made. And the fact that Friesner is at Signet, while an encouraging sign of something stirring to life over there, is so much at the beginning of the stir that if she's not careful she will be run over by the future bylines that will be recognized when the community gets around to discovering Signet. At that time, the community will start the calendar running as of that date, the way it always does, and Friesner is apt to be Old Hat, below the baseline. The only thing that will save her is shotgunning — putting out so much product, so rapidly, that some of it will stick . . . as product.

It was with some astonishment, as I was not quite saying, that I found myself reviewing two Signet books. Both with typical Signet covers and blurbs, Anderson's even plonkier than Friesner's, both clearly stemming from some sort of in-house conviction that the way to sell more product is to package it generically.*

**And, in a related phenomenon, it's nearly impossible to read the title type on either book. Probably this is because both type-designs are determinedly designer-y, but it's quite possible that the publishers accepted these designs because their marketing philosophy holds that the specific content of the title is not relevant, whereas the design instantly says "Fantasy" in the case of the Friesner and "Sci-Fi" for the Anderson.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But, like the Friesner, the Anderson isn't generic. Furthermore, Anderson may be a target writer, with a very likeable target.

He writes a clean, straightforward prose; a tad less journalistic than Heinlein, a shade this side of Lucius Shepard. And while ostensibly this is supposed to read as hugger-mugger about Satanism in a culture where technology produces sanitized zombies for sale to do the heavy lifting and also the dusting up, what it is is a story about people trying to do the best they can, with even the villains well aware that the normal human condition is decency. There's a very nice final scene, for instance, which sums all that up and reminds me of how unusual it was, before Lucius, to have somebody write the kind of thing that only Richard McKenna used to write, and he dead lo these many years.*

Now, I don't know whether decency actually is the normal human condition, but I do know beyond question that the depiction of decency is artistically powerful in a way quite different from the knife-edged shocks of indecency shown in detail. (I note I have some inner scale for detecting which sort of behavior is being depicted.) And I am always glad to see it; it reassures me, in some pervasive way, when it is shown. It's not easy to do, because I think its author has to have an instinct for it, which Lucius does and Tom Reamy did, or it goes all hollow and repellant. So I am glad to see Kevin J. Anderson among us.

I hope he sells well. And fast.

**It's interesting, and significant, that you can't just call somebody a good SF writer any more, because nobody knows what that means. You have to refer to some other specific bylines, a fact whose meaning struck me after I had done it and wondered why I was, once again, freighting a good new talent with such comparisons.*

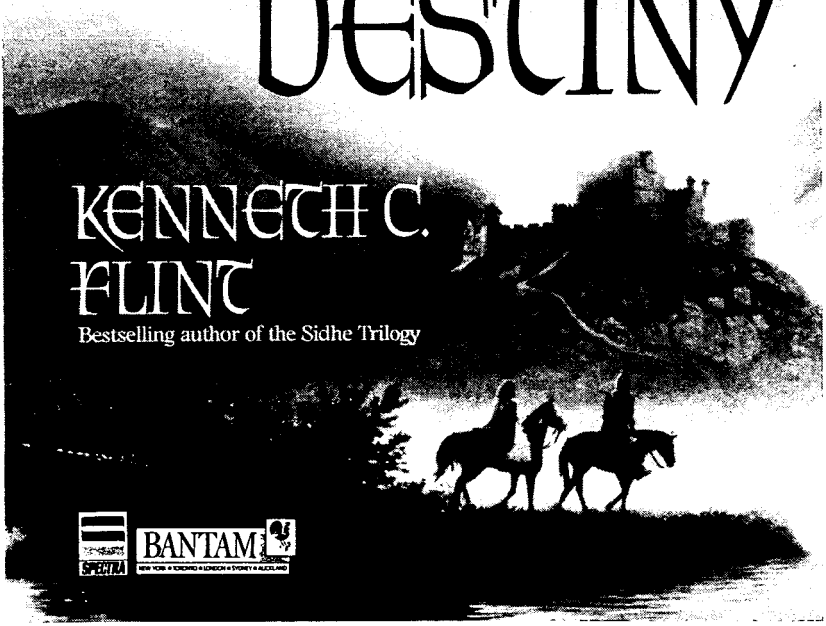
Celebrate 1988: Magic Year of the Dragon
Choose from the greatest selection of dragons.
sculptures,rubber stamps,coffee cups,belt buckles
lapel pins,card holders,stationery,posters,
pendants, book ends, and much more.
T-SHIRT
This intense dragon is silkscreened on all-cotton T's.
Colors: Black on white, ivory, wildberry, or light blue.
Sizes: S, M, L or XL
$11.50 + $2 ship.
(Calif Res add 6% tax)
VISA
800-322-6040
(In Calif 707-839-8911)
Send $2 for holographic sticker & dragon catalog
Dancing Dragon Designs - Dept SF
1881 Fieldbrook Rd Arcata, CA 95521

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Out of the mists of Ireland's past... a tale of mighty heroes.

For generations the tale has been sung of a magical land and the proud people who ruled her. Now, through the extraordinary talents of Kenneth C. Flint, the heroes of legend are reborn: Sentanta, warrior of the Red Branch, and Conaire Mor, fated to be Ireland's greatest ruler... the exiled Queen Maeve, willful daughter of the mysterious Sidhe... power-hungry king Conchobar and the High Druid Calatin, whose cunning magic threatens them all...

ISLE OF DESTINY



KENNETH C. FLINT

Bestselling author of the Sidhe Trilogy

SPECTRA

BANTAM

NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Books to Look For

BY ORSON SCOTT CARD

Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman, *The Darksword Trilogy: Forging the Darksword* (Bantam Spectra, paper, 391 pp, $3.95); *Doom of the Darksword* (Bantam Spectra, paper, 385 pp, $3.95)

IN CASE the names haven't stuck in your mind, Weis and Hickman are the authors of the *Dragonlance* series, books that have been marketed as the BIC shavers of medieval fantasy. Without ever reading a word of *Dragonlance*, I was sure I knew all about it — books designed like *Dungeons and Dragons* modules, characters that could have been "rolled up" with ten-sided dice, prose as lovely as a software user's manual.

Then I met Tracy Hickman at a convention at BYU in Provo, Utah. To my astonishment, in panel after panel he said all the right things about what *he* believed good fantasy storytelling required, and I resolved to overcome my bias and give his writing a chance. He kindly gave me a copy of *Forging the Darksword;* soon after, his publisher sent me bound galleys of *Doom of the Darksword.* I have read them both, and I hereby eat crow.

Not a *lot* of crow, mind you. The *Dungeons and Dragons* elements are still there (Hickman has designed games for TSR), as the authors occasionally launch into a completely irrelevant discourse on the different kinds of magic or races of magicians — we get enough of the rules of this fantasy world that we lack only a list of hit points and strength points to start up the game. But overlooking such excesses, these are worthy additions to the medieval-fantasy tradition.

The world was founded by refugees from our Earth's persecution of witches. So pervasive is

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

magic in this place that everyone flies — except for catalysts, who cannot fully use magic. Instead, the catalysts — descendents of whose we have called "familiars" — focus magical power and provide it to others. Even humbler than the catalysts, though, are the Dead — people born alive, but without magic. Usually children born utterly Dead are allowed to starve to death — these magic-users cannot conceive of a life without magic as being worth living.

The story follows a catalyst named Saryon and a Dead child named Jarom as their lives converge in the making of the Darksword, a terrible weapon that swallows up and destroys other people's magic. Along the way we explore a truly remarkable and well-conceived society; the authors have developed the social implications of pervasive magic with anthropological thoroughness. Both sex and technology are regarded in this world as loathsome reminders of an unpleasant past; our heroes, naturally, find themselves unwillingly but irresistibly involved in both.

Forging the Darksword almost dies aborning — the portentous, off-putting prologue is followed by an even more portentous and off-putting second prologue, which is followed by still another portentous and downright infuriating scene of a royal child being born Dead — until the authors finally have mercy and flash back to a story with a *character* in it.

Once the story is under way, however, it becomes quite gripping. The style of writing is very formal, the point of view omniscient, almost as if the authors hadn't read any fiction written after 1880. The result is a bit stiff, sometimes —the dialogue could have used a few more contractions — and the language is faintly embarrassing when the authors attempt to rhapsodize or the characters gush. But all in all, the weighty language sets an appropriate tone for what is definitely *not* light fantasy. Later in the first book, when a dangerous but hilarious character named Simkin plays a sort of *Scarlet Pimpernel* role (complete with the euphemistic oath "sink me"), the formality serves as a delicious counterpoint to the humor. And when Saryon makes his terrible sacrifice at the end of *Doom of the Darksword*, only high and formal language would be fitting.

The Darksword Trilogy is not innovative; if anything, it's a throwback to an earlier kind of novel. But innovation is not an absolute virtue; nor is recidivism always a literary crime. Weis and Hickman have set out to create a fantasy that is at once entertaining and substantial

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

— and they succeeded on both counts. I would never write a book like this; it's not the way I choose to tell my tales. But I was delighted and moved as I read it; I applaud the first two acts, and look forward eagerly to the third.

Tom Deitz, *Fireshaper's Doom* (Avon, paper, 306 pp, $3.50)

A couple of years ago, Tom Deitz's *Windmaster's Bane* was a marvelous first novel. Set in contemporary rural Georgia, it was the story of a group of teenagers getting involved with some pretty ugly and dangerous characters from faerie. I heartily approve of magical (as opposed to horror) fantasy that uses contemporary American settings, and *Windmaster's Bane* is one of the best of them — one of those rare fantasy novels that I can give to friends who don't usually read fantasy.

Fireshaper's Doom is a sequel, and it shares many of the virtues of the first book. If you liked *Windmaster's Bane*, reading *Fireshaper's Doom* will feel like coming home, as David, Alex, and Liz get caught up in a tangle of vengeance among the sidhe.

Unfortunately, though, Deitz seems to have misunderstood the appeal of the first book. Perhaps because the rural Georgia setting is so familiar to him, he didn't realize how fresh and wonderful it seemed to readers like me; perhaps because he's still fairly new at this, he didn't realize how very ordinary his faerie folk were. The result is that *Fireshaper's Doom* spends far too much time among the rather boring gods of faerie, and nowhere near enough time with the kids in Georgia.

After ten billion celtic fantasies, it's *Georgia* that feels exotic and fascinating, while the sidhe are as thin as a worn-out sock. It's as if Homer, in writing the Iliad, had virtually ignored the Greeks and spent all his time showing us the conversations of the gods. Even the Bible only brings in supernatural beings for a few hot special-effects scenes. Good stories are about real people.

Fireshaper's Doom is a pretty good book; it only suffers by comparison with the very good book it follows. And since I'm not a *real* reviewer, but merely a recommender of books, I will perform my humble function, and gladly recommend them both.

Wayland Drew, *Willow* (Ballantine/Del Rey, paper, 276 pp, $3.95)

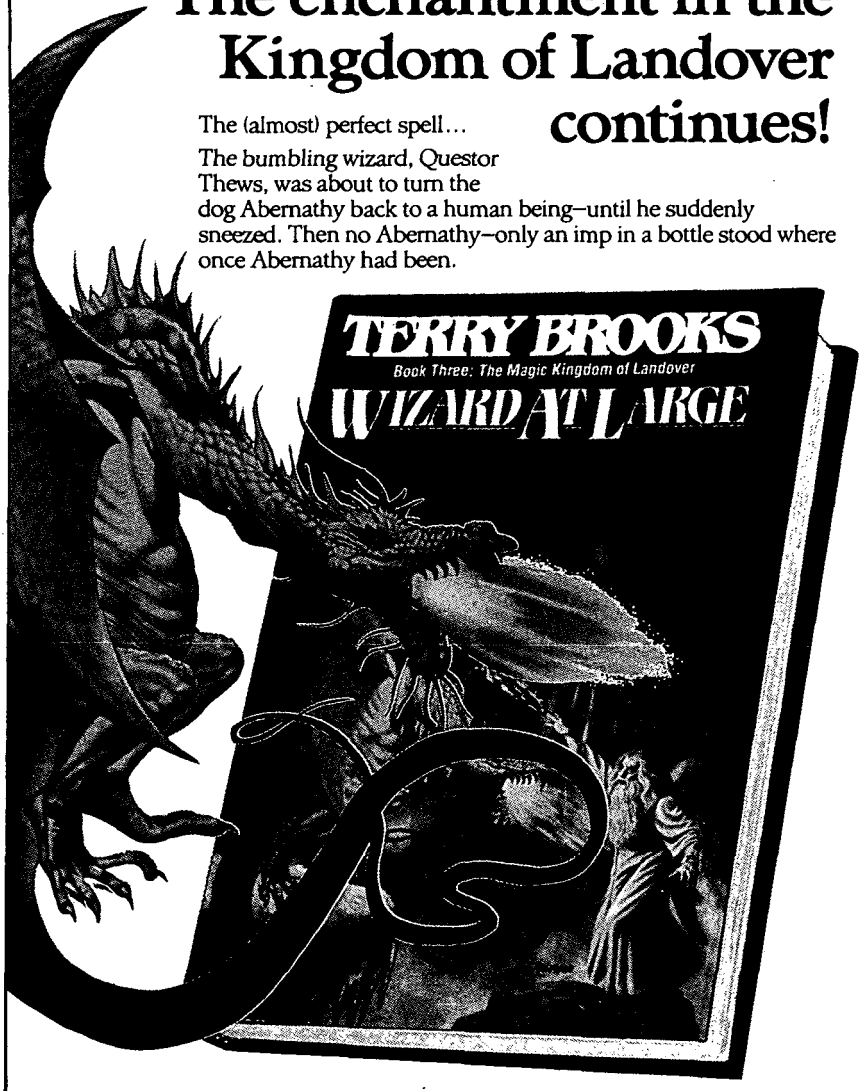
The official credit line on this novel is "A novel by Wayland Drew, based on a screenplay by Bob Dolman, from a story by George Lucas."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The enchantment in the Kingdom of Landover continues!

The (almost) perfect spell...

The bumbling wizard, Questor Thews, was about to turn the dog Abernathy back to a human being–until he suddenly sneezed. Then no Abernathy–only an imp in a bottle stood where once Abernathy had been.



A Del Rey Hardcover

DEL REY **#1 in Science Fiction and Fantasy**
Published by Ballantine Books

On Sale in October $17.95

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

But the credit line should certainly be extended: " . . . from a story by George Lucas, based entirely upon every movie Lucas has ever seen, and taking place in a world pretty much borrowed from J.R.R. Tolkien."

How churlish of me. After all, this is exactly what Lucas did with *Star Wars* — bring together all the wonderful mindless space opera of the 1930s and 40s and make it real. And as I sat there in the theatre with my cliche beeper going off every fourteen seconds, I couldn't help but admit I was having a good time. My kids loved it — as powerful a movie experience as they've ever had. My daughter was disconsolate when the midwife died. Children are the perfect audience for this film: they haven't seen it all before.

But the book. Ah, yes, the novelization. You see, I read it *before* I saw the movie, just so I could review it here — as a book. And I can tell you this: It is a faithful adaptation of the movie. It has faithfully reproduced all of the movie's flaws. Unfortunately, the special effects of Industrial Light & Magic and the charm of individual performers and the sweet directorial touch of Ron Howard were not present in the novelization.

Drew seems to be a pretty good writer, but he is trapped in the dilemma of all novelizations. The story already exists. Somebody else wrote it. He is, therefore, merely a translator. Not a translator from one language to another, however — he is translating from one medium to another, and the sad truth is that it's damned hard to do it well.

You know the problem, because you've seen it time after time going the other way. A good movie generally contains as much story as a long novelet or a short novella. So to translate a novel to the screen means leaving out a lot of stuff — including the entire inner life of the characters. Working in reverse, the "novelizer" finds he must fill up a novel's-worth of pages with only a novelet's worth of story. Yet he cannot fill it with his own invention — he must, like any good translator, slavishly try to reproduce someone else's world, characters, and events. Worse yet, few novelizers get to see the final cut of the movie —their manuscript must be turned in while the film is still being filmed.

The result is that Drew did about as well as one can do in a thankless job. His prose gets purple now and then as he tries to describe what can only be shown, or tries to show the attitude of a character who consists of nothing more than a few lines of dialogue with an actor inserted to say them.

Can a novelization ever be a really good novel, in novelistic *(to page 160)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NEWS FROM Questar
SCIENCE FICTION/FANTASY

THE QUESTING HERO RETURNS IN BOOK III OF HUGH COOK'S *WIZARD WAR CHRONICLES.*

The misadventure continues with Togura—sword-master, death dealer, dragon tamer and questing hero extraordinaire.

Armed with magical words of power and commands he learned from the wise old wizard of Drum, Tog has resumed his quest with the confidence that he will return a hero. But with killer rocks, restless natives and Rovac warriors to contend with, he just can't remember which magic words do what—or even what it is he's questing for! And if he doesn't find the index—the key to that ancient eccentric receptacle known as the odex—he will never rescue his lady love from its mysterious depths.

Cover art by Don Maitz
0-445-20664-0/$3.95
(In Canada: 0-445-20665-9/$4.95)
AT BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE

POPULAR LIBRARY

Also this month... THE QUEST FOR THE 36

An innovative, highly entertaining fantasy from a new writer hailed as "a talent to watch."*

Dexter Sinister is an ace booking agent facing the challenge of his career—a search for the legendary 36, the only men and women on earth honest and good enough to stave off the darkness that's pushing the world closer and closer to apocalypse. Aided by an oddball assortment of his acts, Dexter launches the wildest, most desperate talent search in history—one that takes him from the eerie tundras of the Arctic, to the mystic regions of the Southwest desert, to an ultimate reckoning in Yankee Stadium with an awesome power that will decide the fate of all humanity.

Cover art by Richard Hescox
0-445-20670-5/$3.95
(In Canada: 0-445-20671-3/$4.95
AT BOOKSTORES EVERYWHERE

POPULAR LIBRARY

*Harlan Ellison

A WORD FROM Brian Thomsen

When I was a kid I loved "cliff hangers." Seeing the hero's ship explode (with him inside, apparently) or an entire city about to be destroyed was always a way to make me come back for more. Though I was born way after the heyday of Saturday afternoon matinees at the Bijou, I was always more than content to settle for my Saturday and Sunday morning doses of Buck Rogers or Flash Gordon on my local television station.

It's not necessary to have a cliff-hanger ending to make the reader want to come back for more. Subjects such as "the fate of the world" (as in THE QUEST FOR THE 36) or "the continuing adventures of" (as in THE HERO'S RETURN) are enough to hold people's attention. However, in the end, it always comes down to good storytelling. That's what I look for in my pleasure reading. When you see me around, ask me who was the only writer to win a Hugo, a Nebula and a Campbell in the same year.

© Popular Library 1988

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The Audition" is a disquieting piece from Thomas M. Disch, a man of diverse talents and author of, among other works, "The Brave Little Toaster" (F&SF, August 1980), and its recent sequel, The Brave Little Toaster Goes to Mars *(Doubleday). Thomas Disch writes that "The Audition" was originally written as a piece of* grand guignol *for an anthology of plays that never appeared. As well as creating this macabre little play, he is also working on a modernist adaption of* Ben Hur *for an off-Broadway company.*

The Audition

A Short Play

By Thomas M. Disch

THE SCENE HAS a split personality: half a carpenter's workshop, complete with a large buzz saw at far stage left; half a jumble of morbid collectibles and stage props — skeletons, a top hat, a horror movie poster. JOE is discovered at his work, pounding nails into a small pine coffin. He gives off the same half-and-half impression: half burly carpenter, half Count Dracula.

A knock on the door. Joe drapes the coffin with a flourish of a black cape and goes to answer the door. MARY enters. She's wearing a raincoat over a black dress. She could be an actress of any age or temperament, though she must be short and delicate, a woman who would certainly be at a disadvantage in a struggle with Joe.

MARY

Are you Mr. Death? I'm Mary. I called this morning.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOE

About the ad, right. Ever worked in a magic act before?

MARY

No. But the ad said "Experience Unnecessary," so I thought. . . . I mean, I don't really have any idea how that trick is done, whether it takes some kind of contortion, or what. All the ad said was, I should be under five foot two. I guess so I fit inside the box?

JOE

There's no box. Easiest way to explain it is to give you an audition.

MARY

An audition? Here?

JOE

That way you can see how it's done. And whether it's something you want to do. Take off your clothes.

MARY

(Protesting)

Oh, if it's going to involve anything like that—

JOE

Not *all* your clothes, dum-dum. Just the raincoat. I can't saw you in half while you're wearing that, can I?

MARY

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(With a nervous laugh.)

I really wouldn't know.

(Mary allows Joe to help her off with her raincoat. He hangs it on the coatrack from which he'd taken the cape to drape the coffin. There are two other coats on the rack. One's obviously his. The other is a woman's.)

JOE

(As he hangs the coat.)

Shoes, too.

MARY

(As she removes her shoes.)

Shouldn't we discuss the, uh, wages and hours and like that? How often do you perform?

JOE

(Readying the slab to which Mary is to be strapped when he saws her in half.)

At this point we're talking only about a single performance. If it goes over, who knows, we may be doing it every night. In a sense I'm just as much a beginner at all this as you are, but it's not that hard if you've got the equipment. Which is basically just a saw—

(He flicks an electric switch that sets the three-foot-diameter buzz saw whirling and whining, then flicks it off.)

— and a slab.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(He gestures toward the board positioned at the far end of the small trolley track that feeds the slab into the blade of the buzz saw.)

MARY

(She's become visibly uneasy. She stands with her shoes in her hand, looking first toward the door, then toward her hostage raincoat at the other side of the room.)

Somehow I'd had a different idea. I thought it was all done with, um, mirrors. And that I'd be inside some kind of box. I mean, that saw doesn't look like an illusion.

JOE

Oh, it's not. It's the genuine Black & Decker article. That blade can chew through a six-by-six beam like it was balsa wood. I'll show you.

(While Joe demonstrates the capability of the saw with a large block of wood, Mary edges round to the coatrack.)

MARY

(Genuinely puzzled.)

Then how do you . . . ?

JOE

Like you said — it's done with mirrors. Spread out on the slab here, and I'll show you.

MARY

Well, on second thought, Mr. . . . um. . . . On second thought, I don't think I'm cut out for this.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(Mary grabs her coat off the rack, while Joe crosses to the other side of the stage to block the way through the door.)

JOE

Sure you are, Mary. Sure you are.

(Grinning.)

Though "cut out for it" is kind of a funny way to put it. If you see what I mean. Now come on, don't play hard to get. *You* made the appointment for the audition. So get on the slab and—

MARY

(As she tries to get her shoes on.)

No, really, I've changed my mind.

JOE

Oh Mary, why make things difficult? If the saw gets you nervous, you can just close your eyes.

(Mary shakes her head emphatically. Then, pulling at her shoelaces with too much force, she breaks the shoelace, swears. . . .)

MARY

Oh damn!

(. . . and lets her head sink in a pose of helplessness.)

JOE

(Getting down on one knee so that they are eye to eye.)

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

All you've got to do is trust me.

MARY

(Succumbing, with a little laugh.)

Where have I heard that line before? Oh, all right — show me what I've got to do.

JOE

(As he helps her to follow his directions.)

Just lie back on the slab, so your waist is at about this line here. Right. Ankles here. No, spread apart more — there's a separate strap for each ankle.

(He buckles the straps about her ankles.)

MARY

Do you have to strap me down for the trick to work?

JOE

Well, it wouldn't be that exciting for the audience if they thought you could just get up and walk away.

(He pulls off the shoe with the broken lace and tosses it aside.)

The whole thing depends on their believing that I'm really going to cut you in half. You see, people like to *believe* in magic. It's like with a mind-reading act. Wrists go up by the head, not by your sides. Wouldn't want to cut your hands off, would I? Here, like this.

MARY

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Not so rough.

JOE

(As he straps her wrists to either side of her neck, in the pose — palms up, elbows spread to the side — of someone sunbathing.)

Sorry. You see, most people — I think women especially — really want to believe that there's something to ESP. ESP stands for extrasensory perception.

MARY

Yes, I know that.

JOE

But that's all a load of bull. No one can read another person's mind. I mean, can you read mine, right now, this minute? Of course not. O.K., I think you're squared away, but give it a try.

MARY

Give what a try?

JOE

Struggle, as though you were trying to break loose.

(She struggles, but without much force.)

Put some muscle into it, can't you? Arch your back. Right, that's better. Now twist your pelvis round in the direction of the audience.

MARY

Which way's that?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOE

(Nods toward the front of the stage.)

Straight ahead.

(Mary obediently struggles, though feebly and without conviction. Joe looks on with dissatisfaction, and at last just shrugs.)

Well, that'll do, I guess. Now, when I turn the saw on, I want you to start screaming. Ready?

MARY

What do I scream?

JOE

Oh . . . "Help! Save me!" — stuff like that. Ready?

MARY

I guess so.

JOE

Then here goes.

(He switches on the buzz saw, and Mary begins screaming, not yet loudly or convincingly. Slowly and ponderously, the slab to which she's strapped advances by some hidden mechanism toward the whirling saw blade. Joe, as he watches her progress toward the saw, begins to get into his magician costume: first the cape from the coffin, then a top hat, finally a stick-on twirly black mustache. From time to time, as he dresses, he shouts advice.)

Scream from your *lungs* — not from your throat! You'll hurt your voice if you scream like that.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(As the slab gets close to the buzz saw, Mary's screams become quite sincere, for they're directed to Joe, not an imaginary audience.)

MARY

Hey, this is close enough! Turn off the saw, will you?

(Joe pantomines, pointing to his ear and to the saw, that he can't hear her. He seems more concerned with making his mustache stay glued under his nose than with her increasing desperation. At last, after as long an approach as is dramatically feasible, when Mary is able to avoid the whirling blade only by twisting sideways and then backward, Joe turns off the buzz saw. The saw and the mechanism moving the slab rumble to a stop.)

(With hysterical relief.)

Oh Jesus! Jesus, I thought you were really going to—

JOE

(Bending over her, studying her face.)

So — what did that feel like?

MARY

What did it *feel* like! What in hell do you think it felt like? Jesus!

(She begins to choke. Her voice is raw from screaming.)

Please, enough is enough — let me off this thing.

JOE

But we haven't done the magic part.

* * *

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARY

That's O.K. I'm not really interested in that. I'm really not right for this job.

JOE

No, really, you were terrific. I mean, there're some girls who come in here — But there's no need for you to be twisted sideways like that. I can disengage the feeder.

(He gets down on his knees to make an adjustment under the slab as he continues talking.)

There've been other girls who've answered the ad — though I guess I shouldn't say "girls," should I? That's considered demeaning these days. Anyhow. There've been *women* who've come here, and they're scarcely inside the door before they start freaking.

(He stands up and pulls the slab some inches back from the blade.)

How's that — better?

MARY

Listen, if you want me to beg, I'll beg. Please, take these straps off. This is very upsetting.

JOE

Yes, I should think it would be. I don't understand why anyone would be willing to get into such a situation in the first place. Why *did* you answer my ad — if you don't mind my asking?

MARY

I needed a job — why do you think?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JOE

Yeah, but I mean, it's a kind of unusual job.

MARY

I suppose it was the idea of show business. Now, *please,* undo these straps. We can talk as much as you like when—

JOE

(Not so much interrupting as seeming unaware that she is talking.)

Show business — right! That's what it was for me, too. Of course, I'd been interested in magic since I was a kid. But just simple tricks, like with coins and scarves.

(To demonstrate, he pulls a colored scarf out of Mary's ear.)

But I never thought of it as a possible career till I got laid off my job as a janitor. But that's a long, complicated story, and I'm not getting into that now. My name is Joe, by the way. I don't think I thought to introduce myself earlier on. "Mr. Death" is just a stage name. Obviously.

MARY

(On a sudden desperate impulse, as loudly as possible.)

HELP! SOMEBODY HELP ME! HELP!

JOE

(Ignoring her entirely, in a reflective tone, pausing from time to time as she screams again.)

Anyway, I spent most of a year practicing the basic sleight-of-hand stuff and working up more elaborate tricks. Including the traditional lady inside the box with swords going through it from every side. And I got this booking agent to come see it. And you know what he said?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

MARY

HELP, SOMEBODY, HELP!

JOE

He said it was too old-fashioned. He said the trickery was too obvious. He said what people want to see is a lady sawed in two and have guts spilling out like they do in the movies. He said people have grown used to *realism*.

MARY

(Her voice is tiring.)

Please, somebody — Help!

JOE

He said if I could work up an act where I sawed a lady in two, right in plain sight of an audience, just a buzz saw and a lot of blood, he said people would definitely pay to see that. And I suppose he's right. Don't you?

(Mary says nothing. She closes her eyes. Her body sags in evident surrender.)

Ready?

(She nods. Suddenly and with no preparation, Joe switches on the buzz saw and pushes the slab, with Mary on it, through the whirling blade. The curtain closes rapidly, and the audience catches only a glimpse of Mary being sawed in half. No sooner are the curtains fully closed than Joe parts them and steps forward to take a bow. He gestures to the side of the stage, as though urging his assistant to take a bow with him, but Mary does not appear.)

THE END

This play can be published only by arrangement with the author's agent, Barney Karpfinger, 18 East 48 St., New York, NY 10017.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This is Paul J. McAuley's second story for F&SF; *his first, "The Temporary King," appeared in January 1987. With "Inheritance" he chills us with a harrowing tale of a man who, like so many, goes in search of his roots.*

Inheritance

By Paul J. McAuley

THERE WAS NO doubt about it: he was lost.

Robert Tolley crumpled the map with an abrupt motion and levered himself out of the rented Volkswagen — no easy task, for he was a tall man running to fat, and the seat low-slung — to get a better look at his surroundings. He had parked the car in an embayment before a gate in the hedgerow, so that he wouldn't block the narrow, unmarked road. Now he lit a cigarette and leaned against the old-fashioned stile, looked across the rough meadow, and wondered if he shouldn't simply abandon the search and turn back to Oxford.

A fine rain hung in the air, the kind, slightly too heavy to be a mist, that the English called a mizzle. Quaint, like calling an elevator a lift, or fall autumn, or the way the peppy red Volkswagen was called a Golf rather than a Rabbit. Like, but not like. The way the fields, vividly green even at the beginning of December, were subtly different from the New Hampshire pastures of his childhood.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Tolley was about to climb back in the car, when he saw two figures leave the cover of a clump of trees in the far corner of the field and start across it. A dog's bark lifted across the grass, flat-sounding in the damp air, and the animal, a black-and-white collie, reached him before its owners, wriggling under the gate and dancing about, barking. Tolley shifted back uneasily and murmured, "Good boy, good boy," afraid that it would jump up against his new Burberry, or worse.

One of the walkers, a man, climbed the stile and called to the dog. "Don't fret," he told Tolley, his voice thick with some northern accent. "He doesn't bite."

"Maybe you can help me," Tolley said. "I guess I'm a little lost."

"Ask away." He was a wiry man of about sixty, a checkered cap pulled low over springy white hair, an expensive camera slung over the shoulder of his Norfolk jacket. Now he turned and held his wife's hand as she clambered over the stile — at least, Tolley guessed that she was his wife, a small woman a few years younger than her husband, around Tolley's age. Her glossy black hair was bound back in a girlish ponytail, and a silk scarf peeking about the top button of her fur-collared coat lent her an exotic, gypsyish air. She raised her hand to her throat and said, "You're American, aren't you? We have a son over there, in Boston."

"Harvard University," her husband added.

Tolley said, "I was looking for a place called Steeple Heyston. You know it?"

Clearly they did, for they exchanged a look. The man said, "You must have missed the turn. It's about a mile back, only a rough track and not signposted. Nothing there anymore."

"I understood there were ruins. An old manor house. That's what I've come to see; my family on my father's side lived there. Tolley. The name mean anything to you?"

Again that exchanged glance. The man said, "There's still a bit of the old manor house. Visiting on your own?"

Tolley explained that he was divorced, and had no children. "I guess you could say that I'm the last of the line," he said, and saw the woman touch her throat again. "I'm on sabbatical now," he added, "just touring around."

"Oh, you must be at a university," the woman said. "Our son is a professor of biology."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"My field is history. The Italian Renaissance, specifically."

"That must be difficult, you in America and all."

"Oh, UCLA has plenty of documents, and the Getty Museum even more." Tolley smiled. "I'm afraid we've bought up a lot of your past. We don't have too much of our own, I guess."

"Tell you what," the man said. "When you've done at Steeple Heyston, you come back and have tea with us."

"Why, that's very kind of you."

"No trouble. We live in South Heyston, just two miles along this road here. Glebe Cottage, two doors down from the pub. You can't miss it. Come and see us when you've done at Steeple Heyston, and we'll tell you about it."

"You're interested in local history?"

The woman said unexpectedly, "It's a terribly sad place, Professor Tolley, terribly sad. The saddest place I know."

"She thinks she's sensitive, does our Marjory," her husband said, with a smile that indicated that *he* certainly did not believe such nonsense.

"It's true enough," the woman said proudly. "The seventh daughter of a seventh daughter."

"Well," Tolley said, amused. Surely, here was a fine example of that famous English eccentricity. "It's kind of you to invite me to your home. But I didn't catch your name?"

"Beaumont, Gerald and Marjory." The man stuck out his hand, and Tolley shook it. "You best be getting on," Gerald Beaumont told him.

"It's not a good place to stay after dark," his wife added.

They watched as Tolley fitted himself into his rental car and awkwardly turned it in the narrow road, stalling once, because he wasn't used to the stick shift, before he was off, the pair and their dog dwindling down the perspective of hedgerows in the rearview mirror. "Not a good place to be after dark," Tolley said to himself, smiling: superstition and religion had no place in his world. After all, he'd done his thesis work, and subsequently published a book (which had gotten him his tenure) on the influence of the Renaissance philosopher Pietro Pomponazzi, who believed that all phenomena could be attributed to natural causes, admitting no miracles, no demons or angels. Of course, Pomponazzi hadn't dared to take the next logical step, which was to eliminate God, but it seemed to Tolley that the light of science had penetrated every corner of the universe, right

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

down to the buzzing wavicles of the fundamental particles, without any evidence of an Epicurean creator overseeing all. And as for ghosts . . . well, Steven Spielberg was welcome to make millions from films about them, but that was as far as their reality went.

He found the turn and steered the car, its springs complaining, down the rough, unsurfaced track, which ended in a space of long grass with trees on one side and an unkempt hedge on the other. Tolley switched off the motor and clambered out. He could hear water running somewhere in the distance, and the lonely winter sound of rooks hoarsely calling across bare fields. The car motor, cooling, ticked behind him.

There was a gate in the hedge, sagging on its posts and held shut with a loop of orange twine. With the feeling that he was trespassing, Tolley lifted the loop and pushed through. Beyond was a wide, rough meadow, on the left bounded by a copse of bare trees, on the right sloping down toward the river, presumably the Cherwell. Ahead was an embankment, and, as Tolley watched, a train drove out of the misty distance and slid past, the lights of its passenger cars like a string of yellow beads, the roar of its passage dragging behind as it dwindled toward Birmingham.

Tolley dipped his chin inside the collar of his Burberry and started across the grass. There had once been a narrow road there, a continuance of the track, but now it was quite overgrown. Humps on either side marked where houses and cottages had stood. Not a stone showed now.

He went on toward the copse and, as he walked past the first clump of trees, realized that he was amongst the ruins of the manor house his family had once owned. But curiously, the realization struck no chord in him, for all that he had looked forward to the moment.

Perhaps it was because there was hardly anything left. Here was a low hummock, narrow and straight, all that remained of a wall; there was a huge brier patch that might once have been a rose garden. Beyond the trees was the only part of the house still standing, ragged shoulders of wall either side of a great chimney, a cluster of octagonal stacks that must have been Elizabethan. Here and there were heaps of stone blocks covered with ivy and grass; nothing else. Tolley took a few photographs in the doubtful light with his pocket Olympus; only when he had finished did he notice the building standing a few hundred yards beyond the ruins, a small, undistinguished church with a low, square tower. The hedge around its graveyard had grown wild, long whips of briers trailing from it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like unkempt hair, and the headstones stood in waist-high grass obviously untrimmed since spring. Yet the gravel path was free of weeds, and a hand-sized pane broken from one of the stained-glass windows had been patched with hardboard; obviously, the church was still cared for, although its congregation had long since deserted it, or lay under the long grass. Tolley stood at the wicket gate, then turned away. It was growing dark, the sun a smear in the clouds low over the cold fields; too dark, he told himself, to examine the gravestones, to look in the church for relics of his family. He would come back tomorrow.

Perhaps it was just as well his grandfather had squandered the family fortune: these grassed-over ruins were not much of an inheritance. He wondered how it had come to such a state. The end of the line. Well, he might as well see everything, he thought, and walked down to the river. It was divided by a long, narrow island that lay in the shadow of the railway bridge; just opposite the place where Tolley stood were the remains of a big, square building. A mill of some kind, he guessed, for the far stream dropped in a glassy rush over a weir. One wall still stood, surrounded by a clump of scrubby trees. As Tolley framed this in his viewfinder, it seemed that someone was standing in the shadows there, a man with an oddly shaped head. Or no, he was wearing a tall hat —

A freight train trundled around the curve and crossed the bridge with a hollow roar, sounding a two-note horn. Tolley glanced up, then took his photograph. But the figure, if it had ever been there, was gone.

A tumbledown farm, a string of concrete-block council houses, and then a cluster of picturesque cottages around a tiny village green, a church steeple rising against the evening sky behind them. Tolley found Glebe Cottage easily enough, although he would have preferred a stiff drink to the tea the Beaumonts had offered; but the pub was closed, and Tolley hadn't yet mastered the arcane English licensing laws to know when it *would* open.

Gerald Beaumont didn't seem surprised to see him, and showed him into what he called the lounge, turning down, but not off, the big color television that was showing some old B-movie. All through the strange conversation that followed, the television flickered and mumbled in its corner like some idiot child.

Seated in an overstuffed armchair, Tolley began to relax, feeling a little

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

like a fledgling cuckoo as the Beaumonts fluttered about, plying him with hot, milky tea and a stack of biscuits and little buttery cakes. They were eagerly attentive to his descriptions of the States and, in particular, of Boston, as if he could somehow evoke their lost son. Gerald Beaumont was a mining engineer who had taken early retirement, and they had moved to be near their only child when he had been working at Oxford University; but then he had become another statistic in the Brain Drain and had left them stranded and alone in the soft Oxfordshire countryside. To hear them talk, it was as if *they* were exiles in a foreign land.

"Well now," Gerald Beaumont said at last. "What did you think of Steeple Heyston?"

Tolley licked his buttery fingers; he'd eaten all the cakes and most of the cookies (no, he remembered, biscuits). "You were right when you said that there isn't much to see. Or at least, not in twilight. I must go back and look at it properly, take some more photographs." He had forgotten until that moment the glimpsed, foreboding figure — perhaps it had been nothing more than a figment of his imagination, conjured out of shadow and suggestion, but he still felt a shiver, an undeniable frisson, at the recollection.

Gerald Beaumont said, "It's a good place for photography. Wait a minute."

"Oh Gerald," his wife said as he rooted in a cupboard. He drew out a large, loose-leafed book and passed it to Tolley.

Large eight-by-ten prints, black-and-white, one to a page. The church. Its serried ranks of gravestones, all sunlight and shadow. Weeds thrust up against a lichened stone. The rough scape of a frosty field, with the chimney standing against a bleak sky.

"Very professional."

"My wife doesn't approve," Gerald Beaumont said, shyly pleased.

"You know how I feel about that place," Marjory Beaumont said firmly. A lavender cardigan was draped over her shoulders like a matador's cape, a big Victorian brooch pinned to its lapel. The paste jewel flickered in the light of the open fire.

Tolley said, "You were going to tell me the story of Steeple Heyston."

She looked at her husband, who nodded fractionally. "Well," she said, leaning forward as if delivering a confidence, "you saw the railway a little past the ruins. That's the old Oxford-to-Birmingham line, and it was about

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a hundred years ago that the tragedy happened."

"A hundred and six," Gerald Beaumont said.

His wife went on: "There was a passenger train on its way to Birmingham going in one direction, and a freight train in the other. Well, one of the cars of the freight train jumped the tracks and pulled others across the line just as the passenger train was about to meet it. They used to say that you could hear the shriek of brakes in Oxford, that the sparks from its wheels set fire to a quarter mile of the embankment. Well, the freight couldn't stop in time, and hit the passenger cars. The first major railway accident that was, killed over forty people. But not so many would have died if the people of Steeple Heyston had been able to help them. The squire there wouldn't let them, you see. He had been against the railway from the start, because it came so close to his house. When the other passengers carried the injured away from the wreck and called on the villagers for help, the squire told his tenants that they were not to go near. 'Let them use their blasted railway to save themselves,' he's supposed to have said. Well, it was more than two hours before a relief train arrived, and by that time, many had died who might otherwise have lived. You can see where they're buried, in the churchyard. The squire tried to prevent that, too, but the diocese overruled him. Two graves under the old yew hold bodies that never were identified, a man and a woman. They say you can see them on the anniversary of the accident, searching the track."

Tolley smiled. "And have you seen them?"

"I wouldn't go there on that night, or any other. It's a sad place at the best of times. I have a feeling of something wanting, in need, not at rest."

Gerald Beaumont said, "I'm not given to believing in ghosts and such myself, but it's true that Marjory fainted there once, won't go there again."

"It's the woman, I expect," Marjory Beaumont said softly, as if to herself. "It usually is."

"You didn't know about this, Professor Tolley?" her husband asked.

"Not a thing. My grandfather never said a word about what happened to the manor house. That he came from Steeple Heyston, I know only because my father saved his naturalization papers. That's about all he left the family." There had been money, but most of it had been squandered before Tolley had been born, the rest lost in the Wall Street Crash. All Tolley had inherited was an appetite for luxury and a careless attitude toward money: his ex-wife's accusations of profligate spending had stung

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

when her other charges had not, because Tolley knew that it was true. He had always wanted more than he could afford.

"Do you know what happened after the accident? No? It seems," Gerald Beaumont said, "that ten years after, there was a great fire in the manor house, and at the same time the mill burned down, too. That was the only reason the village existed, the manor house and the mill, and people drifted away afterward."

"I guess that was when my family came to the States. My grandfather was about eighteen then. Don't know anything about his father: he would be your squire, right?"

Abruptly, Marjory Beaumont got to her feet. "I'll make another pot of tea. You'll have a cup before you go."

"Why, thank you."

"Traffic's bad this time of night," Gerald Beaumont said as he carefully laid away his photograph album. "In half an hour the worst of the rush hour will be over."

"I appreciate it. I'm still not used to driving on the wrong side of the —"

The collie, which all the while had been dozing in a corner, scrambled up, looking at the door of the lounge and growling in its throat. Then there was the sound of crockery smashing. Gerald Beaumont hurried out, and Tolley followed.

Marjory Beaumont was standing in the middle of the small kitchen, her hand at her throat. Her husband asked what the matter was, and she pointed at the window. Her hand trembled. Backed by night, the glass had steamed over, and in the condensation had been traced two letters, an *O* and an *R* linked together.

"I saw it happen," Marjory Beaumont said in a small voice. The lavender cardigan had slipped down from her shoulders and lay on the floor. Her husband put an arm around her, and she added, "I didn't ever think it would come here. I'm sorry, Professor Tolley. I think you ought to go now."

Driving back to Oxford, Tolley thought that it would have been easy for the woman to have set the whole thing up: the story, the excuse to leave the room, deliberately dropping a cup and acting out a pretense of shock. Crazy English, he would have nothing more to do with them. He lit a cigarette and switched on the car radio; as one after another headlights of returning commuters flashed past in the darkness, the car filled with the solemn tones of the BBC news. Steeple Heyston, the ruins,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the shadowy figure, seemed far away.

Early the next morning, Tolley found an express photographic developer that promised to have his slides ready that afternoon, then walked to the Bodleian and bought a visitor's ticket, solemnly swearing not to injure any volume or light fires in the library, and spent a couple of hours browsing in the local history section, utterly at home amongst the serried shelves of leather-bound books, the little desks walled off from each other. The librarian brought several accounts of the railway accident, all more or less confirming Marjory Beaumont's confabulation, and Tolley ordered references to the history of Steeple Heyston as well. It had been mentioned in the *Domesday Book*, but had seemingly declined in population ever since, a process Tolley's ancestors had speeded up by shrewd use of the enclosure acts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the middle of the nineteenth century, Steeple Heyston was no more than a hamlet dependent upon a small paper mill; then there had been the fire Gerald Beaumont had mentioned, the beginning of the end. The last cottage had been demolished after the Second World War, although the church was still occasionally used.

Tolley pocketed his notes and left, joining the press of laden shoppers slowly swirling past long lines waiting for the double-decked buses to take them back to the suburbs. Street performers strummed guitars or juggled in shop doorways; at the crossroads a Salvation Army band was playing carols beneath a huge plastic Santa Claus strung in the cold air.

Tolley found a McDonald's and hungrily devoured a cheeseburger with all the trimmings, washed it down with a milkshake. Looking through the plate-glass window toward the tower of ChristChurch, poised like a spaceship beyond the town hall, he thought: The hell with all the mystery; I'm on vacation, right? He spent the next couple of hours checking off the minor colleges he'd missed the first time around, and only reluctantly fought his way through the crowds to the photographic shop.

When the assistant handed him the envelope, he opened it straightaway. There were the slides he had taken at Stratford-upon-Avon, and the few of Oxford he had taken before leaving for Steeple Heyston, but that was all. He asked, "What about the others?"

The assistant, a teenager with streaks bleached into her hair, shrugged. Tolley looked into the envelope, found a strip of milky film, asked her

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what the problem was. She didn't know, and didn't seem to care. He waved the ruined film, protested, "It looks like you've made some kind of mistake."

"I dunno, it's all done by computers and stuff. Maybe your camera's broke."

"Let me speak to your manager, if you won't help me."

"He won't be in the shop until the day after tomorrow. It's Christmas, see."

"Not really," Tolley said, but this wasn't the first time he'd come across such willful unhelpfulness in England. He paid and left to look for lunch. Anger always made him hungry.

That afternoon, his stomach comfortably distended by steak and kidney pie, his anger tempered by several pints of bitter, Tolley returned to the hotel, intending to take a nap. But when he pushed open the door of his room, it stuck halfway. Something was lying on the floor behind it; the case he'd set on the folding frame. He reached around and shoved until the door opened far enough for him to be able to squeeze past. And then the smell hit him: a dense stench of burning, thick as molasses. Yet there was no smoke. His case and its contents, mostly underwear, lay on the floor behind the door, and the bedclothes had been pulled off. Tolley opened a window to get some fresh air, and dialed the reception desk. His first thought was that the room had been burgled; but his camera was sitting on the night table, next to his Walkman and Bach tapes. And as the dialing tone burned in his ear, he noticed the carpet. Scraped into the pile were the letters *O* and *R*, linked in just the same way they had been on the Beaumont's kitchen window. Just as the clerk answered, Tolley set the phone down.

There were two explanations, he thought, as he drove the rental car up the Banbury Road out of Oxford. Either the Beaumonts were hounding him for whatever crazy reason, had broken into his hotel room, maybe even bribed the photographic shop to ruin half his film . . . either that, which was so utterly unlikely, or what Marjory Beaumont had told him was true. And he couldn't believe that, either. But he wanted to go back to Steeple Heyston: in full daylight this time, and preferably not alone.

Gerald Beaumont looked surprised when he opened the door, but after Beaumont had ushered Tolley inside, his wife came out of the lounge and

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

said, "I thought you might be back, Professor."

Tolley managed a polite smile, told them that his camera had broken and couldn't be repaired here . . . but he would like some pictures of Steeple Heyston and wondered if Gerald Beaumont would mind . . . ? He'd thought this up as he had navigated the country lands — not a very good excuse, but better than telling the whole truth. If the couple was behind this, perhaps he could lull them; perhaps they'd commit some obvious error.

"Is this important to you?" Marjory Beaumont asked.

"Well, I promised myself I'd take some pictures back of the old ancestral home. I'll pay for the film, of course."

"I'd be delighted," Gerald Beaumont said. "We'd best hurry to catch the light."

Tolley saw the look his wife gave him, stern yet at the same time worried. "Be careful now," she said. "Do be careful."

"Stuff and nonsense," Gerald Beaumont told her amiably. He said to Tolley, "She had quite a shock last night, I'm afraid."

"I'm sorry if it had anything to do with me," Tolley said disingenuously.

Marjory Beaumont touched her throat and smiled; Tolley saw for an instant the vivacious girl she had once been. "I know it was nothing conscious on your part, and we invited you here after all. So you believe it now, Professor?"

"I admit to being kind of skeptical before," Tolley said tactfully. He was wondering, What is she trying to con out of me? Is it something to do with her son?

She followed them out to the car, watched as Gerald Beaumont fussily settled his equipment on the backseat. "Take care," she said, then turned and hurried into the cottage.

As Tolley shifted the car into first gear, he said, "I hope I haven't upset your wife."

Gerald Beaumont was fiddling with the seat belt. "She doesn't mean anything by it. High-strung, you see, and after last night. . . . I'm not what you'd call a spiritualist, Professor; I've always believed that there's an explanation behind everything, if you look hard enough. Being an engineer, you see. But last time we went to Steeple Heyston, you know, a couple of years ago now, she fainted. Sensitive to atmospheres. D'you think there's something to the idea that places might be printed by things

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that happen there, if you follow me? That would be your ghosts, you see. Perhaps you acted like a catalyst, your family being from there."

"That was a long time ago." Almost, but not quite, Tolley was tempted to tell Beaumont about his ransacked hotel room, the stench of burning, the initials in the carpet pile. But that might blow the whole thing; instead, he pretended to be intent on driving. Soon the car was bumping down the track, and he pulled up in the same place as the previous afternoon.

The air was cold and sharp. Frost still lay in hollows, and a light mist floated above the water of the divided river. Tolley felt a little frisson, pure anticipation, when he saw the ruined stub of wall amongst the scrubby trees on the island. He had Beaumont take a couple of photographs of it, waiting patiently as the older man fussed with his camera and (of all things in this electronic age) a light meter. The frost made the contours of the ground easy to read, and Tolley could make out the long strips of the ancient field system beyond the hummocks where the village had been. Everything was quiet and still, the solitude emphasized when a train passed.

"It's a lonely place," Beaumont remarked, uncannily echoing Tolley's thoughts. "But it's not as bleak as this in summer. Buttercups all over the place, boats on the river there. People like to picnic here."

"Yeah? You know, I wish the title to the land were still in the family. This would be a great place for a hotel; just think of those ruins as a feature in the grounds."

"It's nice enough as it is," Beaumont said stiffly.

"I'm sorry. I forgot you English don't like things to change."

"And you Americans don't know anything else; that's why you think the past is quaint instead of real." Perhaps it had been intended as a rebuke, but the man was smiling; and after a moment, Tolley smiled, too.

They were amongst the scattered remnants of the manor house now. Beaumont laboriously framed and took a picture of the chimney, then turned up the collar of his Norfolk jacket and asked, "Did you have a look at the graveyard?"

"Just a glance."

"They still use the church a few times a year, you know. Come on, I'll show you the gravestones. Some of the inscriptions are rather funny."

But first he led Tolley beneath the spreading shade of the yew tree

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He heard a drawn-out metallic screeching, a frantic sound keening toward the edge of disaster.

behind the church, where two gravestones stood apart from the others, their brief inscriptions blotted by lichen. "Them are the buggers that are causing the trouble, according to Marjory."

"I thought your wife said it was the woman?"

"Who knows? Seems daft to me, talking like this. It's this place, Professor Tolley, if it's anything. Not anyone who was buried here. Down in the mines, you know, there are galleries you don't like to be alone in, old workings with a funny feeling to them. Miners are as superstitious as sailors; like it or not, I suppose a bit of that rubbed off on me. About places, though, not ghosts."

Tolley thought of the initials scrawled in the steam on the kitchen window, and then thought of his room. How could a feeling, a sense of place, do that? He said, "Let's take a look at those inscriptions you mentioned."

Rather than funny, Tolley found them prim and touchingly pious, almost wishful. Death had not been an end to those people, but an interval, a sleep. He left Beaumont photographing them, and stepped inside the little porch of the church. The iron handle of the door was stiff; then it gave, and the door creaked open.

It was colder than outside. Tolley shivered, looking at the brief row of pews either side of the aisle, the plain pulpit and the draped altar beyond. The windows were narrow, their slots edged with dogtoothing; Norman perhaps, although the glass was Victorian. Below, tablets were set in the rough stone walls, one listing the names of those killed in the Great War, a dusty poppy wedged in the iron holder beneath it, another mentioning a Victorian incumbent of the parish. The next was *in memorium* of Alfred Tolley, squire of this parish, and his wife, Evangaline, both dead in the same year, 1886. Was that when the manor house had burned down? Beyond were other memorials of his family, and, as Tolley began to examine them, he thought he heard the door creak open. He asked, "How old is this place, Mr. Beaumont?"

Silence. Tolley looked around. He was alone. The door was closed.

It was then that he heard a distant, drawn-out metallic screeching, a frantic sound keening toward the edge of disaster; and then it cut off.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He smelled the same gritty, sulfurous stench he'd encountered in his hotel room, and a voice said out of the air, "You'll none of you help them! Let their damned engines come to their aid!"

Tolley grasped the edge of a pew, and the prick of a splinter in his palm brought him to himself. His first step turned into a stagger, and then he ran, wrenching the door back and bursting out into the bleak daylight. Gravel scraped under his shoes, and he stopped, gasping, air achingly cold on his teeth. The church door hung ajar on the merest sliver of darkness; with an effort, Tolley turned away from it. Near the gate in the overgrown hedge, Gerald Beaumont was preparing to photograph yet another headstone. Tolley called, "Did you hear something just then?"

Click. Beaumont looked around. "What was it?"

Tolley's hands were shaking; he couldn't stop them shaking, jammed them inside the pockets of his Burberry. He thought, for a moment only, a tape recorder maybe, a hidden speaker. . . . He said, "I don't know. Like . . . no, forget it. Shall we go back now?"

"There are memorials to your family in there; did you see them? I've my flash attachment; I could —"

Tolley began to walk toward the gate. "No, that's O.K. Let's go, huh?"

Beaumont fell in beside him. "Are you all right? You look as if you've had a shock."

"No. No." I'm not crazy, he thought; I'm not. Suppose this guy *is* trying something on, him and his weird wife. But that's as crazy. He said, "Just a touch of indigestion. Can't get used to your heavy breakfasts."

"Staying at a boarding house? I know: greasy tomatoes and a great doorstep of fried bread."

"I'm at the Randolf Hotel, but it is a little like that. Too much for me." Tolley looked at the ruins amongst the trees as they passed them, looking for a shadowy figure. Nothing. Urgently, he wanted to escape, and in the car startled Gerald Beaumont by popping the clutch and spinning the wheels of the Volkswagen as if he were a teenager laying down rubber in the drive of his girlfriend's house.

Outside the Beaumonts' cottage, Tolley thanked the man for taking the photographs, and promised to send him copies.

"I've my own darkroom: I could develop the film now, if you like."

"That's very kind, Mr. Beaumont, but I can get it done in town."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Well, come in and wait while I unload the camera. Marjory'll make you a cup of tea, if you like. Good for the stomach." Beaumont twisted the key in the lock and pushed open the door, saying, "I'll write my address on —" And then he saw the dog scratching at the closed kitchen door at the end of the hall. "Bill! Bill, what's wrong, boy?"

The dog glanced back and whined, then resumed its patient scratching, pressing its nose to the joint of the door. Beaumont reached over it and twisted the handle; the door gave, but only a little. Tolley felt a cold mantle grow over his skin. Beaumont pushed harder, grunting, and then the door scraped open, and both men saw what lay beyond. The dog barked and bounded inside to lick his mistress's hand where it lay outstretched on the floor.

After Marjory Beaumont had been taken from Emergency to a ward, her husband following the porter who wheeled her stretcher toward the elevators, Tolley asked at the desk whether he could get something to eat, and was directed through a long hall and up a flight of stairs to a snack bar set up in the blind end of a corridor. But the cheese roll sat like a cannonball in his stomach, and the coffee, faintly greasy and with grains of undissolved powdered milk floating on the surface, was undrinkable.

He sat for an hour at the little Formica table, listening to the chatter of the people around him but not taking any of it in. Once, he absently traced the letters *OR* in spilled sugar grains, then hastily erased them. The mark had been all over the kitchen, scraped in pools of flour and salt on the floor, in drying tomato sauce (they'd first thought it was blood) on the appliances and on the windows. Whatever had done it seemed to be single-mindedly trying to communicate something. Someone's initials? Its own? At any rate, Tolley no longer believed that the Beaumonts had anything to do with it. It was something else.

At last, Beaumont pushed through the swing doors; Tolley stood and met him halfway. "How is she?"

"Sleeping now. They gave her something."

"Do you know what happened?"

"She said that she thought she glimpsed someone through the kitchen window, but she can't remember anything after that, next to waking up in the hospital."

"Who? A man?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"She can't remember, and I didn't press her. She needs her rest."

"I'm sorry."

"There was something else. Just as she was drifting off, she said something, a name. Orlando Richards. Mean anything to you?"

"O.R.!"

"That's what I thought. And then she said, 'One wants rest, and the other wants worse.'"

"Well, two people were killed, after all." Tolley held the door for Gerald Beaumont before following him into the parking lot. The air was cold and dark; sodium streetlamps dropped pools of orange light amongst the rows of parked cars. Tolley said, "But I remember your wife saying that the woman is stronger, when it comes to ghosts. Isn't Orlando a man's name?"

"I suppose so. These are deep waters, Professor Tolley." The man looked across the top of Tolley's rental car. The lines on his thin face were accentuated by orange glow, deep vertical creases seeming to pull his mouth downward, his eyes shadowy pits. He said, "I don't suppose by any chance you are a Catholic?"

"I'm not anything. What are you thinking, exorcism? Come on, the pope banned all that, didn't he? The best thing to do is forget this."

"How can I now, with my wife in the hospital? It's all very well for you: you can just run away. We have to live with whatever you've disturbed."

"Me? I didn't do anything but come here."

"Aye, well," the man said truculently.

"Look, if you go to a priest and tell him that your wife was attacked by a ghost, do you really think that he is going to believe you, in this day and age? Let it go, Mr. Beaumont," Tolley said, and unlocked the car.

During the fifteen-minute drive back to South Heyston, the two men hardly exchanged a dozen words. Gerald Beaumont's silence was downright accusatory, but rather than guilt, Tolley felt a growing anger. Why should it have anything to do with him, except because of his ancestry? Marjory Beaumont was the believer, not he: why should he be blamed? Still, outside the cottage, he was moved to ask, "Will you be all right?"

"Leave it be," Beaumont said shortly, and got out of the car, then dipped his head and added, "Maybe without you, things will calm down." Then he shut the door firmly, before Tolley could reply.

One wants rest, the other worse. It ran through Tolley's head like a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

maddening jingle as he drove back to Oxford. Worse, presumably, meant revenge. It had torn up his room, let him know its name through Marjory Beaumont . . . and next? The best thing to do would be to leave for London a day early; surely he would not be followed there.

But at the hotel he was unwilling to return to his room, the menacing disorder. He took an early supper in the dining room, lingered over a couple scotches at the bar. But at last he could put it off no longer; he had to pack, and if he didn't make a move, he wouldn't find a room in London in time. At the door the noise of the key turning in the lock was loud in the deserted corridor. He waited half a minute, then pushed the door open.

He had a nasty moment groping for the light switch, remembering an account, surely the world's shortest ghost story, of how someone had awoken with a start and groped for matches to light the candle . . . and felt something place them in his hand. The light came on.

The room was as it should have been: his case on its stand, the bedcovers neatly stretched over the mattress, one corner turned back and a chocolate mint wrapped like a gold medallion on the plumped pillow. Of course, the maid had been in. Even the initials scraped into the carpet pile had been erased by vacuuming. He crossed to the bed and picked up the phone to call the desk.

And, twenty minutes later, set it back angrily. He had tried to get a room in the hotel he'd booked for tomorrow: no luck. And no luck either at the half a dozen others he'd tried. The desk clerk had suggested that he try a bed-and-breakfast place, and Tolley had lost his temper.

"I want proper accommodation, not someone's second-best bedroom. Why is that such a problem?"

"It's Christmas, I'm afraid, sir."

"Don't tell me," Tolley said, "no room at the inn." And slammed down the phone. Well, perhaps he'd be safe here. He checked that the window was locked, and went down to the bar, spent a couple of hours in conversation with a married couple from Idaho — she had majored in architecture, and was in her element, while her husband grumbled half seriously about the bad quality of service, the appalling plumbing, the litter everywhere . . . in short, the lack of all the comforts any truly civilized country could afford in this last quarter of the century. Tolley agreed with all this, while wistfully eyeing the deep valley visible between the woman's breasts (thank God that décolletage was back in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

fashion) and thirstily drinking half a dozen double scotches. At last, dizzy with drink and suppressed lust, he staggered back to his room, remembering only as he was crawling into bed that he shouldn't be there. Warmed through with dutch courage, he even switched off the light.

And woke with the phone warbling beside his bed. He groped for the light switch, picked up the instrument. "Call for you, sir," the desk said, and then there was a click, and Gerald Beaumont's voice said, "Professor Tolley?"

"Sure." It was half past six in the morning. Tolley's teeth felt as if they had been rubbed in ashes; there was a burning edge to his stomach.

"Look, Professor, I didn't want to ring you, but there's no one else I can turn to. And you're involved, after all, you *understand*."

"What do you mean?"

"It's Marjory. She left the hospital."

"She's been discharged? Isn't it kind of early —"

"Not discharged. Gone. Vanished. When the nurse brought her breakfast half an hour ago, she found that Marjory was gone. She'd taken her clothes, too. I think I know where she's gone, Professor, and so do you."

"Shouldn't you call the police?" He was abruptly clearheaded.

"And tell them she's possessed by a ghost? They'd put me away. But I might have to tell them *something*, if I don't get any help, and I still have those photographs of Steeple Heyston. You've got to live up to your responsibility in this, do you see?"

"I understand what you're trying to tell me, Mr. Beaumont."

Beaumont's vioce said, "I'm sure that when I find her, she'll come out of it. It needs someone familiar, that's all."

"If you really think that's where she is, I wouldn't like you going to look for her alone."

"I'm going over there now. I'll hope to see you."

"I said I'll come, goddamnit!" But there was only the buzz of the disconnected line.

More than Beaumont's feeble threats, it was the residue of the past evening's binge that got Tolley down to his rental car and onto the road north out of Oxford. By the time he was bumping down the rough lane toward Steeple Heyston, fear was beginning to cloud his light-headed

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

recklessness, but it was too late to turn back.

There was already a car, a little hatchback, parked in the space at the end of the track; no one else was in it, and the gate in the hedge stood open. Tolley called out to Beaumont. The night took his voice: swallowed it. His skin prickling, he picked his way over the ground, frost crackling under his shoes. It was bitterly cold, dawn a curdled gray limning the railway embankment.

Tolley quartered the hummocky ground where the village had once stood, but there was no sign of Gerald Beaumont. He was about to turn back, when he glimpsed movement amongst the trees ahead, the trees around the ruins of the manor house. He froze, his blood knocking heavily in every corner of his body: but it was only the Beaumont's dog. It came to him uncertainly, its tail low.

"Good boy," Tolley said. "Where's your owner, huh?"

The dog whined, then started toward the trees; when it saw that Tolley wasn't following, it danced back, barking. Tolley called again.

"Beaumont!"

Night. Silence. Tolley's breath plumed in the air.

And then he heard, faint and far off, a harsh squealing, metal on metal. Every hair on the back of his neck rose, as a kind of tide of coldness swept across his skin. He turned and saw, against the advancing light of dawn, a black figure on top of the embankment. It was still for a moment, then seemed to swoop down the steep slope, moving as swiftly as a gliding bird. Already, Tolley's line of retreat was cut off; he turned and began to run, the dog following for a moment before breaking back toward the trees.

Tolley ran on, breathing hard and hardly daring to look back, nothing in his head but the thudding of his pulse and the blind imperative to flee, flee before the thing was upon him. He blundered through the church gate, gravel scattering under his flying feet. The door, the door. . . .

It gave. Tolley stumbled through and leaned against it. A great wind got up around the church, howling and howling, rattling the panes of stained glass. Tolley fumbled inside his coat for a book of matches and, by the light of one, found the great iron bolt and pushed it home just as something crashed into the door on the other side. The wind was even louder now: the hardboard that had patched the broken window flew in with a clatter, and a thick stench of burning began to fill the dark space of the church. The match stung Tolley's fingers, and he dropped it, instantly

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lit another. To be alone in the dark was intolerable.

Whatever was on the other side of the door began to turn the handle back and forth. Tolley retreated, and something struck the back of his knees before toppling to the stone flags. A bench. A pile of little books that had been stacked on one end spilled across his feet. Prayer books. He picked one up, its limp red cover fanning like the wings of a dead bird. Dead, dead and buried. He understood that it was his only hope.

First, he had to have light.

He lifted one of the thick candles from the altar and used several matches to get it alight, and balanced it on the rim of the pulpit. All the while the wind howled and keened, and the hammering at the door never let up, underscored by scrabblings like fingernails on the stained glass of the broken window. Tolley saw with horror one fragment and then another fall, brief twinkling meteors, and scrabbled through the thin pages of the prayer book until he came to the Service for the Burial of the Dead, and began.

The wind did not die as he read the psalm, but the banging of the door became staccato, and no more fragments of glass fell. When he reached the middle of the lesson, the banging ceased. Tolley read on, a weight seeming to lift from his chest, the wind dropping around the church, a mumbling moan that seemed at the edge of words. *Danger, danger.* And as he read, it seemed that he was no longer alone in the church, that a dark shadow occupied the middle of the front pew. He dared not lift his eyes from the page lest he stumble in his recitation, yet the shadow tugged at the corner of his vision, undefined, insubstantial, but definitely there.

And then, his throat dry, Tolley came to the end of the lesson, and realized that he would have to read the last part at the grave. He hesitated, and the wind rose again; the candle flame flickered. There was nothing for it: the forms had to be gone through.

The shadow melted from the pew as, holding the candle before him, Tolley walked down the aisle and fumbled with the heavy bolt. It slid back, and he turned the handle.

Wind blew in his face.

The candle guttered but did not quite go out.

There was nothing outside but darkness.

As he walked amongst the gravestones toward the isolated pair beneath the yew, Tolley felt a kind of pressure at his back, a presence as

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

insubstantial as a shadow. He steeled himself not to look around, and faced the grave of the unknown man, by the light of the candle began to read the final part of the service, saying firmly, "Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of Orlando Richards, here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground. . . ." As he read, the words became more than words: every one a weight that had to be lifted and laid, each a single brick in the solemn edifice that he was constructing. He came to the final prayer and, despite his aching throat, read it loudly, almost triumphantly. After the final *amen*, he heard, far off in the winter dawn — for it was dawn now, although still so dark that he could distinguish no colors — a cock crowing, the traditional end to a night of magic. Tolley blew out the candle and, with the blunt edge of the base of its holder, inscribed the name Orlando Richards on the headstone. Done.

Every step was light on the frosty ground as he walked away from the church. It was over, he thought, his hands trembling lightly with relief. Over. I've done my duty, atoned for what my great-grandfather did. As he skirted the ruined chimney of the manor house, the dog came bounding toward him, barking frantically, dancing around and running back toward the ruin, turning and barking. Tolley followed it.

"What is it, boy? Quiet now. Where's your master? Where —"

And then he saw where Gerald Beaumont was.

The body was slumped where the fireplace had been, amongst a tangle of briers. The face was entirely gone, a mass of blood and bone, but Tolley recognized the Norfolk jacket, the checkered cap that lay a little way off. He turned aside and vomited, though there was little to come. As he straightened, wind blew around him out of nowhere, shaking the bare branches of the surrounding trees. Tolley began to run, the dog at his heels. Wind bent the frosty tufts of grass, once whirled leaves into the shape of a human figure before collapsing and blowing on, always in front of Tolley, who was now only stumbling as best he could, his terror leached by exhaustion. All he could think of were Marjory Beaumont's words about female ghosts, that they were stronger than those of men. And their hate stronger, too, strong enough to last a century even after the object of her hate had fled its first malignant flowering, strong enough to destroy Beaumont, poor bastard, who had been only at the edge of things. The

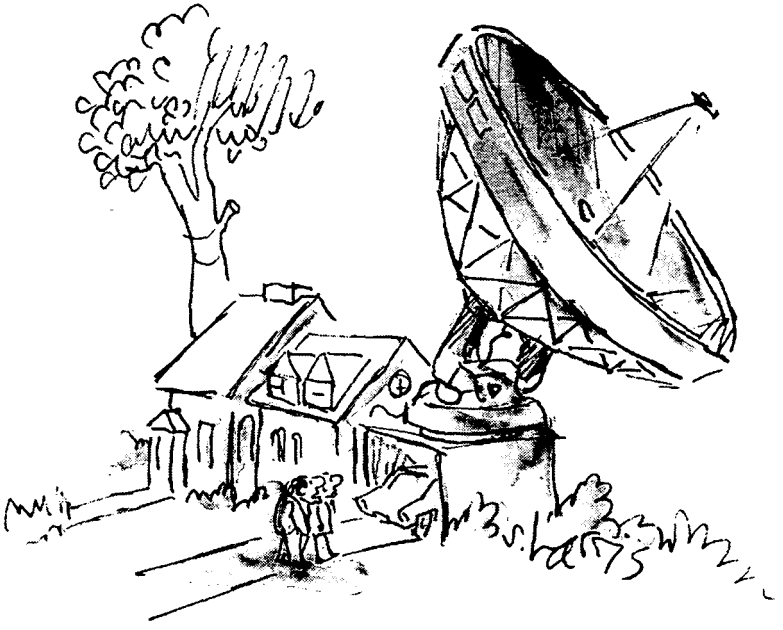
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ghost of Orlando Richards had not been the danger; perhaps he had even tried to warn Tolley of his companion. And now Tolley had laid him to rest.

Panting, Tolley pushed through the gate, saw with dull shock the figure waiting beside his car. For a moment he thought that his heart would stop; then the dog bounded ahead, and he realized that it was Marjory Beaumont, and wondered how he could tell her about her husband. And then she spoke, her voice halting and heavy; her voice, but she was not speaking it.

"I've waited so long for this. So long."

The last thing Tolley saw was the ax she carried.



"I get all the cable channels, I pick up programs from Europe, and I believe I've discovered a new galaxy out beyond Andromeda."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Kim Antieau writes: "I attended Clarion 1980 where I met Mario Milosevic. We married a year later and soon after moved to Oregon. My first story was published in Asimov's *in 1983. Since then, I've sold stories to* Twilight Zone, *SHADOWS, THE YEAR'S BEST FANTASY STORIES and others." Her first story for F&SF is about the search for a genetically altered clone who sings like an angel.*

Trudging to Eden

By Kim Antieau

LOOK, LADY," I said, leaning toward the monitor, "you're going to have to talk to me like this or not at all." I wasn't about to hop a shuttle to Earth just so this woman could see if I smelled right.

Walker shook off his black leather jacket and leaned back in his chair next to me. He grinned. He knew I hated missing-person cases. Our *speciality* was recovering stolen goods—mostly taken from mining operations. I didn't understand why Mrs. Grey had contacted us.

"Very well, Ms. Ryan, this will have to do, then," Mrs. Grey said. She sighed and sat down on her plush white couch and straightened her white satin dress. She did not play the role of distraught mother very convincingly.

Walker cocked an eyebrow and put his feet up on the console. He closed his eyes, telling me he was bored already. I was tempted to cut the connection myself. She wasn't really my kind of people, but she was paying for the call.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"As I said, my seventeen-year-old son, Benjamin Grey, was taken from our house three weeks ago. The police have been here. Despite our considerable influence—" she paused here and took a sip from her champagne glass. "—despite our influence, they have found nothing. They can't find any evidence that he was kidnapped. But he was. He could not have left on his own. He is not capable."

I glanced at Walker. His eyes were still closed.

"Your seventeen-year-old boy isn't capable of running away?"

"You see," she said, looking directly into the monitor, "Benjamin is genetically altered. He was cloned from our first son, Benjamin, after he was killed in an accident."

Walker opened one eye. Benjamin Grey was a geni. The Greys had to have a considerable amount of money and influence. I typed their names into the computer. The stats rolled by: new money, started in mining twenty years ago. Now they lived in a guarded compound in the middle of the Sahara, far from revolutions or chem dumps.

"He was scheduled to be married in a few months," his mother continued, "to Rachel Shipley."

I whistled. Walker opened both eyes. Rachel Shipley. Her family owned stock in every major moneymaking corporation in the Galaxy. We had worked on a case for her sometime ago, recovering stolen diamonds. Now she was almost forty years old, my age. What was she doing marrying a seventeen-year-old boy?

"Your retarded boy is marrying Rachel Shipley?" I asked.

Mrs. Grey set her glass on the teak table in front of her.

"He is not retarded. The first Benjamin always regretted he couldn't sing better. So we had his singing abilities altered. We didn't really understand all of the implications at the time."

Implications! I had seen some of these implications: enhance his athletic ability, and maybe he's born blind; make her eyesight extraordinary, and maybe she can't talk.

"Benjamin is not as mentally acute as the old Benjamin was," she said, "but he sings like an angel."

I grimaced. That was the catch phrase of the decade : sings like an angel. Every month or so, another group or singer toured the mining companies, claiming to be the new sensation. And every tour, the miners crowded into bars or auditoriums to listen to the new singer, waiting,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

hoping for some sound of home to ease the ache, to soothe away the echoes of clanging steel. There was something about miners' eyes, something lost, as if they were in constant pain eternally waiting for relief.

Walker had told me once that I had the eyes of a miner.

"Of course, that is why he was taken," Mrs. Grey said, "because of his voice. Someone could make millions from him. We have always protected him from that kind of exposure. He is so . . . innocent."

"What about enemies?"

She waved a hand of dismissal. "Well of course, my husband and I both have hundreds, perhaps thousands of enemies. We are, after all, rich and powerful. We've been rather shrewd investors."

Walker made a noise; Mrs. Grey looked at the monitor quizzically.

"Why us?" I asked.

"You have a reputation for discretion," she answered.

"She means she's heard we'll work for anyone who pays well," Walker said.

"And I will pay well. After you find Benjamin, you won't have to work for some time."

"I'm putting you on hold," I told her. I switched off our sound and image. Mrs. Grey lit a cigarette and stared into space. A woman dressed in a short black dress and white apron brought her an ashtray.

"You wanted some time off," I said, turning to Walker. "The money from this will do it. It could be an easy case. If he was taken off Earth, they probably used false ID. We can trace him through passenger lists."

"Money up front," Walker said.

I nodded and switched on Mrs. Grey. "Three-quarters payment now, nonrefundable, whether we find little Benjie or not. The balance is due upon delivery."

"I'll have my lawyers take care of it," Mrs. Grey said.

"I'll need access to your files," I said, "and any holos or films you have of Benjamin. We have to know what he looks and sounds like."

"Pardon me?" she asked.

"You want your son found? I need to know who would have taken him and why."

"You may have access to our family files, of course, but must you see and hear him? He is such an extraordinary creature."

"Creature?" Walker said quietly. "Let's shut her down right now. I don't

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

need a vacation this bad."

"Mrs. Grey, you either trust us or you don't," I said.

Mrs. Grey looked across the room. Was there someone there we could not see from the monitor? She glanced at her hands and then up at the monitor again. "All right," she said. "I'll make the arrangements."

"We'll be in touch," I said. Walker switched off the monitor. I grinned. "I told you we'd hit it rich one of these days. Aren't you glad you stuck with me?"

He stared at me for a moment, his eyes and mouth hard, and then he smiled. "Come on, I'll buy you dinner before we start this mess."

"I've been through it all," I said, pushing away from the console. "Every person boarding a transport of any kind in the past three weeks has been real. No aliases or dead people. No fake ID. Our kid is nowhere to be found." Suddenly, pain laced through my stomach. I bit my lip.

"Erin? Are you all right?" Walker got up and came toward me. I turned away.

"Don't mother me, Walker," I said. I breathed deeply; the pain subsided.

"Let's trade," Walker said. "Maybe I'll find something you didn't. The RB edited these tapes. There's a lot missing."

I smiled and nodded. RB: Walker's euphemism for rich bitch. I went to his desk. It *was* easy for me to miss little things—I hated drudge work. I wanted to be out talking to people, asking questions, pulling out answers. I wanted to be in our ship on the way to somewhere, instead of inside this box they called a space station. I couldn't breathe here. It smelled like new dolls, like plastic. I hated it. And when I was here, being still, the pain came more frequently. Sometimes I believed if I left Earth far enough behind me, the pain would be gone, too.

I pulled up the file on the Greys. Walker was right: there was a lot missing. I could guess what was gone. Probably outlines of business deals. The Greys didn't want us to see whom they had screwed as they collected their riches.

Sometime later, Walker said, "Percy Milne left Earth Space Station on the *Arizona* for Shepard's Asteroid on June 5. Then Milne left Earth on the *Nevada* for Cameron on June 6. He could not have been in both places."

"And look at this," I said, freezing the information on the screen. "There is an insurance policy on Benjamin Grey with Lloyd's. If he dies or

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loses his voice, the Greys and Rachel Shipley will be paid ten million dollars."

Bingo! Percy Milne had his ID destroyed the day before he left, June 4; at least he thought so. Someone obviously got ahold of it and used it a day later. There wasn't a long enough lapse for the computer to detect the discrepancy." Walker said, "I think we've found our boy, and he's on Cameron."

"Or was," I said. "Why do you suppose someone would insure a retarded kid for ten million dollars? That's a lot of money even for these people."

I picked up a photograph of Benjamin. He was slightly built, with pale blue eyes and fine blond hair. He looked younger than seventeen.

"We should get this photo to the master and have it sent out to the *Arizona* and *Nevada*, see if anyone recognizes him."

"I'll go do it now," Walker said, taking the photo from me. "You want to come? We've been cooped up here all day."

"Sure," I said.

He held out his hand to me.

"I'm not a cripple," I said, standing on my own.

"I was offering my hand," Walker said, "not a crutch."

I RETURNED TO our office by myself and continued looking at the files for a few hours. When I quit, I knocked on the door to Walker's adjoining room. No answer. He was probably in the ship or at a bar. I went to my room on the other side of the office and fell into bed.

The dull ache in my bones kept me just on the edge of sleep. Dreamlike images floated around the darkened room. It was during these times that I wondered if I was quite sane. What kind of person could endure so many sleepless, nightmarish nights and so much pain? I switched on my stereo. The sound of Richard Strauss filled the room. I let the music come inside me, seeping through my skin to take away my nightmares. I had learned to kill the pain this way as a child. Some children escaped to imaginary worlds; I escaped into music. At least I used to. Lately, even music couldn't keep away all of the pain.

I awakened screaming. I sat up in bed and put my hand over my mouth to shut myself up. My clothes were drenched in sweat. I was shaking. Inside me, something was eating me alive. I bit my hand until I tasted blood.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Suddenly, Walker was in the room. He put his arms around me and pulled me up onto his lap.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm here. It's all right."

"Go away," I said. "I don't need you. You told me you couldn't do this anymore." My voice and hands shook. He gently took off my damp clothes. Then he wrapped a blanket around me and rocked me until the tremors stopped.

"Let's not finish this case," he whispered. "You've got enough money now to get any kind of treatment you want. We don't need this."

"There is no treatment, I said. "You know that. There's nothing except this." I buried my face in the pillow. Gradually, the pain diminished. Walker moved away; I grabbed his hand.

"I'm just turning on some music for you," he said.

I closed my eyes again. Walker sat on the bed, and I put my head in his lap. This time, Mozart washed across me. The pain disappeared, and I felt almost high, as I often did after a particularly bad time. Listening to the music, I felt one step closer to paradise for just a moment. Walker's hand touched my cheek.

"Go to sleep," he whispered. "It'll be better in the morning."

"Confirmation," Walker said as we sat in the office waiting for *Nevada's* response. I read the screen with him. "Same kid. Apparently traveling alone. They remembered his voice."

"I think it's time we heard this boy," I said.

"To the projection room, then?" Walker asked.

"After you, partner!"

Benjamin looked uncomfortable staring at the camera. I squinted, trying to see what Rachel Shipley saw in him. She wanted to marry him? It would be like sleeping with a child. She had always seemed a bit desperate, buying everything and anything; but a seventeen-year-old boy? I shrugged. Rich people did strange things. So I had been told.

Benjamin opened his mouth and began to sing. He was transformed. He seemed to glow. The sound, the music, coming from his mouth was pure, wonderful, wordless. Everything disappeared except his voice and face. I was painless, oblivious. I stared at him and let his sound envelop me.

When he stopped singing and his image was snapped away, the world appeared darker and bleaker than it had moments ago.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I've never heard anything like that," Walker said. "They could make a fortune from him. Imagine what the miners would pay to hear him!"

Walker looked at me. I stared at the place where Benjamin had stood.

"I'll get us clearance to Cameron," he said. He stood up and left the room.

I touched the buttons on my armrest, and Benjamin appeared again. I leaned back and listened. As the pain drifted away, I knew I would find him.

I didn't know if I'd bring him back to Rachel Shipley.

Walker checked with the master again for clearance and then strapped himself in. I breathed deeply. I loved the smell of this ship; it was a new-leather smell—it meant I was going places, leaving the cesspool called Earth far behind. Walker maneuvered the ship away from the space station while I ran through the checklist.

"Is this expressway clear?" I asked when I finished.

"They're ready if we are," Walker said. He pushed the tiny needles into his arms: the ones in his right arm put him to sleep; the ones in his left would wake him. I did the same, but I adjusted the intake. I wanted only enough of the drug in my system to make me drowsy, to take the edge off the walk. I had met one or two walkers who had gone a little bonkers after staying conscious during a catwalk, but I wasn't convinced that the walking was the problem. They'd been a bit strange beforehand. Still, it was regulation, and sometimes a master would conduct a surprise test to make certain that pilots were using drugs. One day, maybe, I would walk without drugs.

"Let's dance this thing across the Galaxy," I said.

Walker smiled and closed his eyes. The ship shuddered.

I lay back in my chair and began humming—or else the stars began singing. Music stroked the Galaxy as we jumped by. Walker slept—catnapping, they called it—while the ship catwalked across the stars. The sounds of a muted orchestra—playing a Bach concerto?—floated around me, each note feeling like something solid I could pull out of the air. I grinned, plucked a B-flat from a passing star, and closed my eyes.

We parked the ship in the space station orbiting Cameron and then asked the master for directions to the *Nevada*. The hangars were quiet today, apparently no incoming tourists or new students bound for

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Cameron University down below. The *Nevada* was at the far end of the hangar.

Captain Steiner was waiting for us.

"He seemed young to be traveling alone, I mean making his living that way," Captain Steiner told us. "But the master didn't question his ID. I wasn't about to. I just walk 'em and dump 'em."

"He wasn't traveling with anyone?" I asked. "His mother seems to think he was kidnapped."

The captain shook his head. "Well, he did spend some time with a girl, but she certainly wasn't holding him captive. We had a couple of layovers, to pick up and drop, and he sang for us during those times. Made a lot of money. You haven't heard singing till you've heard him."

"Do you know where he was going?"

"He never said. He was a good kid. Didn't bother anyone. I wouldn't want him to get into any trouble."

"He isn't in trouble, Captain Steiner. We only want to find him and make certain he isn't being held against his will."

"One of the passengers suggested he go down to Cameron—you know, the music department at the university; thought he could make some money down there. They're always looking for guinea pigs."

"If you hear anything," Walker said, "we'd appreciate it if you'd let us know."

The shuttle ride to Cameron seemed so slow after catwalking, as it always did. Once upon a time, I had come to Cameron to be cured. They were going to use music to heal me. For a while I believed it would work, until they stopped believing; then I left Cameron, found Walker again, and continued looking.

Walker hadn't believed they could help me. Over the years, he had believed in some of the cures, but here, on Cameron, he thought they treated me too much like an experiment. Their methods had worked with some, people with less damage to their nervous systems. There was little anyone could do with someone who had been damaged before she was born. Toxic wastes dumped into mama's system make baby a monster. Only, no one realized it with me for a long time. As a child, I thought it was normal to be in so much pain. After a while, I stopped telling people about it. I grew tired of being treated differently, as if I couldn't wipe my own nose.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The shuttle slipped into the bubble and dropped us in the music division. The buildings looked like every other university building I had seen: smooth and featureless outside; inside, it was strangely quiet, and the hallways smelled faintly of perfume and perspiration.

The head of the department, Paula Freeman, was waiting for us.

"Sit down," she said after we introduced ourselves. "How can I help you?"

"We're looking for this boy, Benjamin Grey." I handed her a photo. "His parents believe he's been kidnapped."

"Yes," she said. "I know him. He called himself Ben White. He sang for us. Have you ever heard him? It was extraordinary. He has such a peculiar effect on people. I wanted to keep him here, studying him, but he wouldn't stay."

"Was he alone?"

"No, he had a young woman with him. Her name was Anny. He told us — through her, of course — that he wants to go to Beller's Place."

"Beller's? Is he ill?" Walker asked.

"What do you mean, 'through her'?" I interrupted. "Doesn't he speak Standard?"

"Why no, he doesn't speak at all. He's quite deaf."

I looked at Walker. The RB had neglected to tell us this little bit of information.

"He's trying to make enough money for an operation to correct his hearing impairment," Freeman continued. "He's a geni, I'm sure you know. I don't know why his parents can't pay for a simple hearing operation."

"They can," Walker said. "My guess is they won't. Do you know where he's going first."

I sat back in my chair. Beller's Place. Beller, the magician. He could cure anyone of anything on his little paradise planet. Almost anyone.

"Anny said they were going to travel in a more or less direct line to Beller's so Alpha Mines would be first."

"Wasn't there a doctor here who could perform the operation?" I asked.

Freeman shrugged. "Probably, but our people haven't worked much with geniis. Beller has. Besides, Ben was determined to go to Beller, thinks he can work miracles. Ben's parents told him his singing ability could be altered if he can hear. Ben hopes Beller can fix his hearing withoug damaging his singing ability. He wants to hear himself sing. He tries to be

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so independent, but it is all new for him. He's never been outside his own home. We all felt a little protective of him."

We thanked her for her time and then left her office and headed for the shuttle stop.

"I say we forget this case right now," Walker said. "The boy obviously hasn't been kidnapped. We can call his mommy and tell her so. We'll keep the money and go on vacation and forget it."

"What about Benjamin?" I asked. In the distance where the bubble distorted the colors of the setting sun into a strange kind of rainbow, a shuttle slipped through the dome.

"What about him?"

"We were paid to find him. Let's do it. We should at least see him before we report back to his mother."

"Report back to her? Why? She's been lying right and left to us. And you don't want to *see* the boy, you want to *hear* him!"

"All right! So I want to hear him. Is that so terrible?"

The shuttle came closer.

"I saw your face when he was singing, Erin. You think he is the cure."

I shook my head. "He isn't a cure. There is no cure; I know that. I just felt good when he was singing."

The shuttle stopped in front of us, and the door opened. We stepped up and took our seats. As soon as our belts were snapped shut, the shuttle automatically took off again. Several other passengers talked between themselves and pointed to sights outside the window.

"Did Beller ever make it go away for you?" Walker asked quietly, not looking at me. "Did he ever make the pain stop?"

The shuttle broke the bubble. I watched the temporary rupture quickly heal itself.

"For a moment," I said. "Only for a moment."

THE MASTER gave our computer access to ship manifests. We quickly discovered a Ben White had gone to Alpha Mines. We contacted Alpha; Ben had left for Beta. Beta said he was still there.

If the boy is trying to hide," Walker said as I got clearance from the master, "he isn't doing a very good job of it."

I set the coordinates for the walk and then took the ship away from the station and the other junk orbiting Cameron. We slipped the needles in; it

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

was a short walk, so the drugs were minimal.

I leaned back in my seat. If Ben made it to Beller's and was operated on, there was a possibility he wouldn't be able to sing again. And then I wouldn't hear him. He wasn't the cure, but he could take my pain away like no one else had. He was the one. He was what I had been searching for. I knew it. I closed my eyes as the ship skipped across the stars.

Most of Beta was on sleep cycle when we arrived. Walker took care of our bill with the master, an old friend of his, and I walked the corridors looking for the bar. This station smelled like burning dust, like when the heater is first turned on after the long summer months. I breathed deeply: it was better than the smell of plastic.

The bar was dark and quiet, no music. A robbie rolled up and down the floor, sucking up spilled beer and food crumbs.

"Can I get you something?"

A real bartender. Good.

"I'm looking for a boy. Benjamin White or Grey. He sings."

On the periphery of my vision, I saw someone shift on a stool, suddenly alert.

"Yeah, he's singing here for a few days. He's probably asleep now. You a Pollyanna? He do something wrong?"

I glanced quickly around the bar. The person on the stool was a girl with long white-blonde hair: Anny.

"No, I'm not with Interpol. I'm just checking to make certain Benjamin is all right."

The girl slid off her seat and bolted for the door. I grabbed her arm. She tried to jerk away. I pulled out my investigator's license and flashed it at the bartender just before he pushed for Security.

"Let me go," Anny cried. She was tiny and frail-looking. She could have been Benjamin's sister. "He doesn't want to go back. Mrs. Grey sent you, didn't she? The old witch!"

I pulled her toward an empty table. "Let's talk."

She sat down reluctantly. I released her arm. "Ben is just fine," she said quickly. "We're doing all right, so you can go now. I'm taking care of him when he needs it."

"If you're in charge of covering his tracks," I said, "you've done a lousy job."

She glared at me.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Look, sister, you better talk to me before the master decides to charge you with kidnapping."

"All right!" She looked down at the table. "My parents are friends of the Greys," she said. "That's how Ben and I met. Well, they aren't really my parents. They were Anny I's parents."

"You're a geni, too?"

She nodded. Robbie slipped by, sucking at the floor.

"They tried to enhance my artistic abilities. It didn't work. Sometimes I think they'd like to arrange an accident and start all over. That's one of the reasons we escaped."

"Escaped?"

"Well, I can come and go as I please. Notice my parents aren't looking for me. But Benjamin wasn't allowed to do anything or go anywhere on his own. They know he wants to hear, but they're afraid it will destroy his singing ability." Anny pushed away from the table. "Benjamin!"

I turned around. Benjamin smiled shyly at Anny. They motioned to each other with their hands. Benjamin frowned and looked like he was going to run. Walker appeared behind him and put his hands gently on the boy's shoulders. Benjamin's puzzled look turned to terror.

"Tell him we won't hurt him," I said. I glanced at Walker. "His mother sent us, but we won't take him if he doesn't want to go."

"I won't lie—"

"Just tell him!" I said.

Anny's hands moved quickly. I motioned to the seat next to me. Benjamin sat down. Walker pulled a stool from the bar and sat between Anny and me.

"My name is Erin," I said. "This is Walker."

Anny signed to Benjamin. He pointed up and signed.

"He wants to know if you are a walker of the stars," Anny said.

Walker smiled. It was a gentle smile, one I hadn't seen in a long time. "Yes, I walk the stars."

"He wants to know if you like music, Erin," Anny said.

"Yes, very much. It helps me through some very long nights."

Benjamin reached for my face. Startled, I almost pulled away. His small, slender fingers touched my cheek. His skin was cool, soft. He lay his fingers across my cheek for a moment; then he nodded and signed to Anny. He finished the signing by laying his hand across his heart.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He thinks you will understand him. He feels great pain in his soul. He must hear his voice. He knows in his heart he will feel better then."

"Does he realize his singing ability could change once he can hear? He might even lose the ability all together."

"He knows that might happen," Anny said.

"But does he truly understand it?"

Anny signed to him. "If he can't hear his voice, then he will hear someone else's. He must hear music. He wants to hear angels sing."

I shook my head. "He's the only angel I've ever heard."

I looked at his eyes and I saw what I had seen in the eyes of the miners and what I had seen in my own eyes. He smiled, but the smile did not include his eyes.

He signed to Anny. She turned to me.

"He wants me to tell you about his parents," she said. "They got Benjamin as part of an insurance settlement after the first Benjamin was killed in an accident. They did that back then before it was decided we weren't such a great idea. When Ben was two, he began singing. When he was old enough to understand, his parents told him he had the voice of an angel, that God had put him here to ease the suffering. Ben's father was working his way up one corporate ladder, his mother up another.

So many people were in pain, mostly from disorders from chem contamination or the dumps. When Benjamin sang, the pain went away. At first, his parents used Ben's ability as a kind of exchange. 'We'll let Ben sing for your sick child if you'll promote me.' After a time, they began selling him outright to very rich people. Their last transaction is intended to be permanent. Rachel Shipley paid ten million dollars for him." Ben only recently found out his parents had made their fortune off of him. They think he's stupid, so they didn't lock down the computer. He's not stupid; he's just innocent."

I sighed. "It seems the RB neglected to tell us quite a few things.

"You won't make him go back, will you?"

I shook my head.

"We're tired," Anny said. "May we go now?"

"We'll talk more later," Walker said.

Anny took Ben's hand, and together they left the bar.

I stood up and stretched. "Come on, old boy," I said to Walker. "This body needs some rest, too."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

I awakened in a sweat, trembling. The shadows moved around me, malevolent shapes coming after me. The tremors worsened. I opened my mouth to scream, and Walker was there, his hand cool against my forehead. He switched on Beethoven. The tremors continued. I closed my eyes against the shadows.

"I wish. . . ." Walker leaned close until I could feel his breath on my cheek. He smelled familiar, comfortable, like new leather. "I wish I could make it all go away," he said, his voice so low I could hardly hear him.

I cried out again as the pain shot through me. Walker ran from the room.

"Don't leave me," I whispered. Then I sank into delirium.

An angel sang to me. His voice was strong, pure, Benjamin's voice. His melodies stroked my face while Walker ran his fingers gently through my hair. "It'll be all right," he said. "It'll be all right." Benjamin's voice pushed away the shadows. I opened my eyes. The pain was gone. Benjamin smiled as he sang to me. His eyes were filled with tears. I started to cry. I was free at last; I had found paradise.

I awakened in Walker's arms. He slept heavily and didn't move when I shifted away from him. My body felt good, loose and painless. I smiled. Benjamin had done it. He had freed me—for now. The pain would return, but Benjamin would be there. He had to be. I could talk him out of going to Beller's. Beller hadn't been able to help me, so he wouldn't be able to help Benjamin. I could tell him that.

I sat up and rubbed my eyes. He was a sweet, innocent boy, and he trusted me. I would convince him to stay with me.

I turned around. Walker was awake, watching me.

"So what are you going to do, kidnap him for real?" he asked.

"Don't," I said. "Please don't lecture me. You can't understand the pain I've been through."

He sat up. "I can't? When are you going to see beyond yourself? Don't you know we're all looking for some kind of Eden? We all have our own pain!" He stood up. I looked up into his eyes. I had not noticed it before: he had the eyes of a miner, too.

Anny was suddenly in the room, crying.

"They're here. They've taken Benjamin."

"Where?" I asked.

"End of the hangars. Rachel Shipley."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Walker, get the master! Don't let them get clearance. Anny, take me to them."

I ran out of the ship and across the hangar floor. The shuttles were filling up with the morning crew. The faces of the miners looked less haggard than on most mining colonies; perhaps they had heard Benjamin sing last night.

Rachel Shipley was walking into her ship when Anny called to her. She stopped and turned around. Her face was lined and tired, desperate. Did I look like that? She smiled.

"Well, hello again, Ms. Ryan," she said. "I wondered when we'd meet again. Thank you for finding Benjamin so quickly for me."

"You followed us?"

"Of course. I recommended you to Mrs. Grey after I peeked at your medical files. We knew once you heard Benjamin that you would have to find him. I wasn't certain you'd bring him back, however, so I just followed you. I understand the attraction, of course. I am not well, either, and he will help me get through the long days and nights.

"Ma'am," the master interrupted, coming up behind me. She was tall and imposing, and I hoped she scared Rachel. "I've been advised that you are transporting someone against his will."

Rachel walked down the steps and pulled some papers from her pocket. "I have legal guardianship," she said, handing the papers to the master.

"The boy is seventeen?" the master asked, returning the papers to Rachel.

"Yes, he is underage."

"Not in this part of the Galaxy. Sixteen is the age of consent. Now, you let that boy come down here, or I will have you charged with kidnapping."

Anny pushed Rachel out of the way and ran up the steps into the ship.

"Any more problems, give a call," the master told Walker.

As soon as the master left, Rachel took ahold of my arm.

"I don't want to hurt Benjamin," she said. "I just want him. The girl can come, too, and you can visit anytime you want. You need him, too!"

Benjamin stood at the entrance to the ship. He smiled and waved to me. I looked over at Walker.

"I don't need him that badly," I said.

Benjamin ran down the steps. I put my arm across his shoulders.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Walker, how about clearing the way to Beller's. I think Benjamin earned enough last night to cover his expenses."

When I had been to Beller's before, he examined me and told me he thought he could help. We spent days together, walking the beaches, running through his tropical paradise; and then one morning, he told me he couldn't do anything for me. I was too "damaged." Afterward I walked to the edge of a cliff and looked across the ocean. It was a beautiful place: unspoiled and unsullied. Beller kept it that way. But that day, standing on the edge of the cliff, I didn't see paradise: I saw only a release from agony. A release I didn't take. Instead, I turned from the cliff, left Beller, and went to find Walker.

Now, as Beller took Benjamin into his clinic, away from me, I felt as though I had just stood on that cliff again—and walked away.

"What do you mean, it didn't work?" I asked. For a split second I was relieved; if he couldn't hear, then he could still sing. "But you said it was a relatively simple operation. Beller, you told me you could help him." Outside his open office, a bird sang; its melody was shrill and annoying.

"He says a lot of things," Walker said, "and then he doesn't do them."

"We fixed his ears. But geniis often have neurological damage, too. We'll trace his brain patterns and find a reason he still can't hear, I'm sure. It will just take some time."

"Meanwhile, you'll keep charging him exorbitant medical fees," Walker said.

"Look, I don't—"

"Shut up, both of you," I said. "How's Benjamin?"

"He was upset at first. Anny said he kept talking about the pain in his soul. He's sleeping now for the first time in days. I'm glad you came back. He wanted to see you. He said you'd understand. He's very much a child, you know, despite his age. He talks about hearing angels sing. I'll take you to him."

I followed Beller down the open corridor. A fragrant breeze pushed ferns against the porch, brushing the wood like tiny green fingers.

Suddenly someone screamed. For a moment I thought it was another bird, and then it became a low, sobbing moan, a sound that made my bones ache. We turned a corner. Anny was curled up on the floor rocking back and forth.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"He's dead," she whispered, "He's dead."

He wrote to me: "I must hear the angels." Then he taped his image and songs for me and left the tape next to the note. The communication from his mother lay crumpled in the wastepaper basket. She said she was coming to get him.

"I wouldn't have let her take him," I whispered. "He must have known that."

"I will never hear music in this world," he wrote. "I must hear the angels to soothe away the pain." He wrote the note, made the tape, and then deftly slit his throat. His white sheets were red. His eyes were closed. His voice was cut in two. "You understand, Erin, don't you?" he wrote.

I remembered standing on that cliff, and I wondered what had made me walk away.

My body ached as we prepared to catwalk. Walker looked tired.

"Why do you stay?" I asked. "I give you so much grief."

He shrugged. Every time I leave, I can remember only the good times." He looked out the window for a moment. "Trudging to Eden with you is better than trudging to Eden without you." He smiled. "Where to?"

"Surprise me," I said. "You wanted a vacation."

"And you're coming?"

"Hurry up before I change my mind."

He talked to the master and then pressed the needles into his arms. I strapped myself in and let Walker take her out. He winked at me and closed his eyes. The ship shuddered. I pushed the needles away. No drugs this time.

The universe sang to me. Colored lights undulated outside the ship, changing with the rhythm of the songs. The walls of the ship moved in and out as if buckling and then unbuckling under some enormous weight. My chest felt heavy. My heart was playing the *1812* Overture. The ship smelled of leather — of Walker. I glanced over at him. He was perspiring. I unstrapped myself and went to him. I gently wiped the sweat from his forehead and kissed his lips.

The universe bloomed red. I strapped myself in again and closed my eyes. The songs of an angel filled the Galaxy. It was a lone, sweet voice, clear and strong, paving the way to paradise.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Inside Science Fiction

BY CHARLES PLATT

INSCRUTABLE SCIENCE FICTION

I FOUND MYSELF suddenly on a city sidewalk. The modern architecture looked strange, somehow, and many of the cars were models that I couldn't remember ever having seen before.

I realized that I was standing outside a science-fiction bookstore. Impulsively, I walked in. The musty smell of cheap paper was reassuringly familiar, and I saw the usual plump, hairy people scanning racks of paperbacks with lurid covers. But—what was this, over by the register? An entire new section of books that were radically different. Their covers looked as if they were fabricated from brushed aluminum. They had the charismatic high-tech lure of electronic equipment. The titles, I saw, were in English—but the names of the authors were all Japanese.

"It started back in the 1960s," said a voice. It came from a stooped, emaciated figure wearing cracked mirrorshades, a dirty raincoat, and decaying sneakers. Wisps of lank hair trailed from the sides of his bald head. "First, the monster movies. Then, in the 1970s, Saturday morning TV animation. In the 1980s, they started exporting their comics. Now it's 1999, and their books are taking over."

"This is 1999?" I exclaimed.

My guide nodded grimly. "Back in your time, you people were so dumb, none of you realized what was happening. American science-fiction publishing in the late 1980s was just another smokestack industy — inefficient, corrupt, riddled with wasteful practices and old-fashioned ideas. Like auto manufacturers in Detroit. A sitting target."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He picked up a sleek Japanese import titled *Laser — Samurai of the Arcturus Dynasty*. "See? Smaller, cheaper, keyed to tastes that U.S. publishers never even heard of, and it's a quality product." He riffled the pages. "No misprints, the paper doesn't turn yellow, and there's optional extras included in the low list price — interior art, dust jackets, even a free bookmark." He opened the book, creased its spine, then shook it. "Plus, the pages don't fall out."

"Astounding!" I exclaimed, excited by these breakthroughs in book technology. "But what about the writing? In my time, the Japanese couldn't even write intelligible VCR instruction manuals."

"Their fifth-generation computer technology does the rough translation. Bilingual experts style the finished product. As for the stories themselves, the plots are better engineered, with no loose ends, and they use only the best materials — no worn-out clichés, no cardboard characters."

"The Japanese always were good at quality control," I concurred with chagrin.

"And they aren't just interested in short-term payoffs," he said meaningly.

I saw his point. Back in the 1950s, American science fiction had been built to last, and had ruled the world. But by the 1980s, U.S. hacks were turning out shared-universe series, Star Trek novelizations, B-movie tie-ins, and any other junk for a quick buck.

"But there must still be some American integrity," I protested. "Authors who care about ideas —"

"The Science Fiction Writers of America spends most of its time lobbying Congress for import quotas," my companion answered sourly. "Meanwhile, I hear New American Library has a deal with Hayakawa for a joint-venture Japanese-style science-fiction factory out in California. They'll do everything by consensus: To write a book, you'll have to collaborate with your editor, the art department, the sales force, and the printer. Plus you'll have to get to work by eight A.M. for morning calisthenics. Considering the physical shape that most U.S. science-fiction writers are in, this alone could make them unemployable.

"Even the magazines are buckling under," he went on. "Look at this." He handed me the January, 1999 edition of *Fantasy and Science Fiction*. With dismay I saw that all the author names on the cover were Japanese.

"Go back and tell your friends what I've told you," my guide advised me. As he spoke, the science-fiction bookstore seemed to grow misty. "Tell 'em, 'Wake up, Science Fictionoids of America!'" His voice was

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

echoing into the distance. I felt as if I were falling. There was a ringing in my ears —

— emanating from the alarm clock beside my bed. I blinked in dawn light and found myself back in my own apartment. What a relief!

But as I sat up in bed, I found a scrap of paper clutched in my hand. I smoothed its wrinkles with trembling fingers. It was a fragment of the cover of that 1999 issue of *Fantasy and Science Fiction.*

Less than an hour later I was dutifully dialling every New York editor I knew. Unfortunately, it wasn't yet ten o'clock, so none of them had arrived at work.

I called some writers instead.

"I find it hard to tell how serious you are," Robert Silverberg told me in his usual calm, urbane style, after he had listened to my vision of tomorrow.

"The facts speak for themselves," I pointed out. "The United States still publishes most science-fiction titles. The Soviet Union prints huge numbers of copies, but of very few books. Europeans buy translations of U.S. science fiction rather than work by their own writers. Britain, our one-time rival, is fading fast. But the Japanese have risen from nowhere to second place, and they've accumulated a huge science-fiction stockpile. Our market is the only thing between them and world domination."

"Well, I take a Darwinian attitude toward many things," Silverberg replied. "If they are capable of putting together hack science fiction, so elegantly produced as to displace our hack science fiction, I say, good for them."

Didn't he feel at all personally threatened?

"Having been through every conceivable catastrophe of the commercial writing field for the last 35 years, and still finding myself able to earn a living, I'm not too worried." As he summarized the various crises that he'd weathered over the years, he sounded like the CEO of a multinational corporation who feels that even another stock-market crash couldn't seriously erode his market share.

I decided I should talk to someone occupying a more vulnerable ecological niche in the literary environment. A short-story writer, perhaps. I dialled Edward Bryant.

"The first thing the Japanese will have to do is give their writers Anglo names," Bryant remarked. "You know, Nicholas Yermakov's books used not to sell at all well, because people thought he was a foreign author being published in translation. But under the name Simon Hawke he's doing very well indeed."

I realized Bryant was mocking me in his usual deadpan style. "Let me remind you," I said grimly, "that

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

executives at General motors once said the American public wouldn't buy cars with funny names like Datsun and Honda. How do you plan to survive, Mr. Bryant, when Japanese writers start stealing your short-story markets?"

"Well, I'm learning to use Japanese buzzwords that I'm extracting from cyberpunk novels," Bryant quipped lamely.

I hung up, distressed by his fatalism. But he was right to mention the cyberpunks; they understood the power of Japanese technology. Quickly, I dialled Bruce Sterling at his home in Austin, Texas.

"While New York publishers have been snoozing at their desks," he told me, "we Austinites have been watching the growing power of Japanese popular culture with great attention and respect."

"Well, that's more like it," I said. "And —"

"Science fiction needs economic expansion," Sterling continued. "It needs bright new dreams, and futuristic ambition, and heavy, heavy bread in the background somewhere. All this action is now in Swinging Tokyo, and we are not at all ashamed to declare that *we want some of it.* So trot out the ninja-thrillers, the time-travel pieces going back to historical events we've never heard of; trot out the Mars Missions composed entirely of guys whose names we can't pronounce. As Americans, we stand ready to devour this stuff and rip off anything in it that works."

"But —" I objected.

"We promise to cheapen and vulgarize Japan's best cultural efforts and sell them back to them at a profit," Sterling's hectoring diatribe continued, "just like we did with Europe. I look forward to a bright new future of ruthless dominance by global sci-fi multinationals. There is a comfy place for us in this, threatening as it may seem to parochial Yankee superpatriots like Charles Platt."

"Was this the ethic that once made American science fiction great?" I shouted down the line. But my only answer was the dial tone.

IT WAS now noon, so I tried calling some editors again. Alas, they were now out at business luches.

I decided to try Norman Spinrad, widely respected for his one-time monthly column on New York publishing. "I think it's probably true that the Japanese would beat us at manufacturing, marketing, and selling the actual books," Spinrad said. "If Bartelsmann, which is a German outfit, just bought Doubleday and owns Bantam, a Japanese company might well decide to buy some ailing American publisher. Robotized factories turning it out, shipping it out by Toyota . . . you know, only one

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

thing really holds back the Japanese from world domination, and that's English."

"Their computer technology will handle it inside of ten years," I pointed out. "Of course, a computer translation can't be perfect, it'll need to be rewritten —"

"Not necessarily," Spinrad replied. "It probably wouldn't be any worse than Lin Carter or John Norman."

A sad comment indeed on the levels to which U.S. science fiction has sunk. For further literary perspective, I dialled Michael Dirda, an erudite editor at *Washington Post Book World*. Receiving literally every science-fiction book published gives him enviable objectivity.

Dirda debunked my vision of a revolution in reading tastes. "If you asked American readers to name any non-English speaking science-fiction writer, other than the Strugatskys and Stanislaw Lem, I bet no one could do so. It will be difficult for the Japanese to break through the xenophobia and the jingoism here. A lot of science-fiction readers are going to hesitate to buy books in which the characters seem strange and foreign, even though science fiction is supposed to be about strange and foreign things. I don't think readers are as flexible as one would hope they would be."

Well, some foreigners used to do well here. British writers Brunner and Aldiss even won American Hugo Awards. But Mr. Dirda was steadfast in his skepticism.

So I tried again to reach some New York editors. I finally got through to one who was not currently "tied up in a meeting," but he was afraid that if he said anything bad about the Japanese, they might refuse to import his company's best-selling paperbacks.

"So I'll quote you anonymously," I suggested.

"Well, all right," he agreed, now that his job security was assured. "Americans are fighting a losing battle against illiteracy and television, and that's where the Japanese will beat us. If they have their way, we'll be watching Saturday morning cartoons every night of the week. It's in that medium that they'll vie for our attention. They're too smart to think that there's any profit to be made in book publishing. As we all know, there isn't."

Sickened by his cynicism, I dialled Baen Books. Specializing in sweeping sagas of militaristic supremacy, they should surely have a more positive outlook. Within moments, I was speaking to James Baen's co-editor, Betsy Mitchell.

"So far, we've been exporting to the Japanese far more than they export to us," she pointed out. "And the science fiction they buy from us is old-fashioned space opera. *They*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

may be behind the times; think about that!"

"You remind me of executives at Kodak laughing at clumsy Japanese attempts to build cameras in the 1950s," I remarked dryly.

"I think science fiction has to be created in the country for which it is being written," she persisted. "You have to have a deep and probably subconscious sense of what the lowest common denominator is, in order to write the stuff that sells 300,000 copies. I don't think that a Japanese author could do it. They can't push all of our buttons, because they have no good idea what those buttons are."

That sounded plausible. But, by the same logic, funny-looking little cars designed for short, skinny foreigners shouldn't appeal to popular American tastes, either.

To find someone who really understood what was happening, I realized I'd have to go to the source: bilingual authorities in Japan itself. I called Takayuki Tatsumi, a critic and translator who once lived in America.

"I know there are many American people now studying Japanese," he said to me from his home in Hiratsuka City. "I met a bunch of them when I was at Cornell. So, perhaps many American people will be translating science fiction in the near future. And, I think the idea of Japan will be getting more familar in America. You see, the unfamiliar is already getting familiar. So maybe it will happen, exporting Japanese science fiction. But only in the *far* future," he added, as if he realized it might be best not to alarm me.

I sensed he knew how vulnerable our science-fiction industry is, but he was too polite to say so. So I called Yoshio Kobayashi, whose translations of American novels appear from Hayakawa, the preeminent Japanese publisher in the field.

"Maybe our cheap kind of Japanese stories, like kung-fu movies, violent and weird and erotic, that kind of junk science fiction could be popular in America," Kobayashi said candidly. "But our quality science fiction is not as strong as you think. We have a weakness in characterization. Japanese writers care very much for scientific ideas, but we are one people, like a family, so we don't tend to sympathize or care for different ways of thinking, only for each other's *feelings*. So our fiction is sometimes very sentimental, but lacks variety of characters. But maybe there could be co-writing between Japanese authors and American authors. Americans are very frank, they don't put themselves in their ivory towers, so that could be a good influence on our authors."

If I understood this correctly, it meant they could sell us their schlock

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

right now, but the high end of the U.S. market was safe till Japanese writers learned to emulate our subtler story manufacturing techniques. There were obvious parallels with consumer electronics, here. In the long term, Robert Silverberg could turn out to be just as vulnerable as General Electric or RCA.

I put down the phone feeling shell-shocked. The only people who took the Japanese invasion seriously were the Japanese themselves. Meanwhile, American writers and editors were cheerfully chanting "it can't happen here." What could I do?

After a moment's thought, the answer was obvious. I switched to the business-letters subdirectory of my word-processing data disk and opened a new file that I optimistically named SELLOUT.TXT. *Dear Mr. Hayakawa,* I began. *When planning your invasion of the U.S. science-fiction market, you may need advice from someone intimately acquainted with the weaknesses of complacent U.S. publishers out of touch with the American book-buying public. This being so, I wish to offer you my services, for an appropriate fee. . . .*

That night, again I sensed the ethereal presence of a balding man wearing cracked mirrorshades and a dirty raincoat. I had prudently taken 10mg of Valium before turning in, however, to suppress dream-state REM. In my tranquilized stupor my guide from 1999 had no hold over me, and I watched with mild amusement as he shook his fist, gnashed his teeth, and cursed me as a traitor. "Sayonara," I murmured to him with a smile, as I settled into a happy dreamless sleep, contemplating the lucrative role that I would soon play in the decline and fall of American science fiction.

Coming Soon

Next month: A contemporary horror tale from Ian Watson, a post-holocaust SF story from Warren Wagar. Soon: new stories by Nancy Springer, Lucius Shepard, Richard Lupoff, Jane Yolen, Kim Stanley Robinson, Reginald Bretnor and many others.

Use the coupon on page 161 to enter your subscription or to send a gift.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Some writers will seek any excuse to avoid writing. In "Posterity," George Alec Effinger relates the agonies one such writer undergoes trying to avoid his deadline . . .

POSTERITY

By George Alec Effinger

COURANE FINALLY MANaged to fall asleep shortly before dawn. Less than two hours later, though, he was awakened by the blood lady, who came into the ward and turned on all the overhead lights. Courane raised his head a little and watched as the blood lady came toward his bed. He knew he would never get any more sleep that night. The awful day had begun.

"Morning," said the blood lady. She set a metal basket of test tubes on Courane's blanket.

"Good morning," said Courane. "You're new."

The young woman nodded. "Today's my first day," she said. She tied a rubber hose around Courane's arm and tapped the veins on the inside of his elbow. Then she fitted a test tube to a syringe and discarded the needle's plastic cap. She looked into Courane's eyes and smiled. "I've never done this before," she said. "You're my first victim."

"Oh boy," said Courane. He felt a quick, ugly chill in his belly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The blood lady tapped a vein again and seemed satisfied. She jabbed the needle home, and Courane winced. No blood flowed into the test tube. "Oops," she said, "sorry."

"It's all right," muttered Courane. He was in the hospital; he expected to suffer pain. If he'd had insurance or money in the bank, he could have been in a private hospital, instead of a charity ward where almost the entire staff was trying out its dubious skills on captive patients.

The blood lady wiggled the point of the needle in Courane's arm until she hit the blood vessel. "Here we go," she said, as the test tube began to fill up. Courane watched as she loosened the rubber hose. When the test tube was full, the blood lady pulled it free and jammed another in place. She hadn't yet learned to change tubes without stabbing the needle deeper. "Just one more," she said. She removed the second test tube and pressed on a third, again sending a jolt of pain through Courane's arm. He lay in the bed, his eyes now tightly closed.

"All done," she said at last. "That wasn't so bad, was it?" She'd moved on to the next bed before Courane had a chance to reply.

Courane let his head rest on the plastic pillow. He stared up at the water-marked soundproofing tiles on the ceiling. He wished he could change position, but he could barely move. To his left, a tube snaked down from an IV bag on a pole into a tangle of white adhesive bandage around his wrist, which was taped tightly to a board. He held his left arm motionless, because he was afraid of dislodging the IV needle in the back of his hand. Another plastic tube connected his right nostril to a squat, noisy machine beside the bed. The tube wiggled and irritated his nose, and the soreness was almost as bad as the blazing pain from the surgical wound in his belly.

Courane prayed for oblivion, but sleep was very difficult to achieve on the charity ward. To Courane, the trouble with sleep was that he couldn't really appreciate the freedom from pain while he had it. He realized his loss only when he woke up again. Of course, in theory he was entitled to a shot of Demerol every four hours. In actual practice, however, that was as hard to come by as sleep.

"Hello," said a soft voice. "How are you feeling this morning?"

Courane looked up at the beautiful woman and blinked. She had long, lank white hair, and she was wearing a bizarre black one-piece outfit, with white gauntlets and a diamond-shaped emblem on her left breast. "Wait a

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

minute," Courane murmured. "I thought I dreamed you last night."

The woman threw her long, pale hair over her shoulder and smiled. "No, it wasn't a dream. I came in to visit you late last night."

"And no one else saw you or heard you."

"That's right," she said.

"And no one else can see you or hear you now?"

"That's right."

Courane frowned. "Then they must think I'm crazy, talking to myself."

The woman laughed. "Would you like some privacy?"

"Please," said Courane.

The woman stood up and drew the curtains around the bed. "How's that?" she asked.

"It's the best we can do. What if someone comes in?"

The woman shook her head. "The nurse's aide will come by in about sixteen minutes. We have plenty of time."

"You're sure I'm not dreaming now?" said Courane.

"You're not dreaming. How much do you remember of what I told you last night?"

"Not much," admitted Courane. "I was sure I was asleep or drugged, and I wasn't paying very close attention."

"All right, we'll start at the beginning. My name is Eldrēs. I'm from the future."

"Yes, I remember you saying that. I remember you showing me all kinds of strange things."

"Do you believe me?" said Eldrēs.

Courane shrugged. "This is the way it is, ma'am: if you're really, truly here, then you're probably telling me the truth. All those futuristic newspapers and books you showed me couldn't be just an elaborate practical joke. But if I ever find out that you're *not* really here, I'm going to stop believing you that instant."

"Fair enough," said Eldrēs. "Do you want to know why I've come so far into the past to talk with you?"

"It would be discourteous for me to say no, wouldn't it?"

"Even if you said no, I'd tell you anyway. The truth is, Mr. Courane, you don't have long to live."

Courane felt the blood drain from his face. "I don't want to know about that," he said quietly.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Eldrēs shook her head. "Well," she said, "it's why we have to get right to work. Your surgery was a success, all right, but there are more tumors in there, and not long from now, one of them will rupture. You're going to die on your own bathroom floor, stark naked, in terrible pain."

"Thanks," said Courane. "Thanks a lot.' He took a couple of deep breaths, but it didn't help the sudden feeling of dreamlike disorientation that had seized him. He felt a monstrous anxiety attack looming.

"I'm terribly sorry," said Eldrēs, "but you can't let it depress you. I mean, everybody dies, you know. Everybody has to face it."

"Yeah," said Courane angrily, "but everybody doesn't have to hear all the awful details in advance. How long do I have? A year?"

Eldrēs shook her head.

"Six months?"

She shook her head again.

"Don't tell me," said Courane. "I really don't want to know."

The woman from the future held up a hand. "Calm down, Mr. Courane. I'm here to help you."

"Help me do what? You've already made sure that however much time I've got left is going to be miserable. I'm going to wake up every morning from now on wondering if this is the day. What kind of a life is that?"

Eldrēs sighed. "Some people do that their whole lives, no matter how old they live to be. I'm telling you this for a reason. I'm giving you the chance to fill the great gap you left when you died in my time line."

"You've come back to change the past, is that it?" said Courane. "I've got it on good authority that such a thing is impossible."

Eldrēs found that amusing. "Whom are you going to believe," she said, "me or one of your science fiction writer friends?"

"Time travel is impossible," said Courane. "Changing the past is even more impossible."

"I can take your pain away," she said softly.

That caught Courane's attention. "How? By getting the nurse for me? I'm due for a shot of Demerol."

"My way is much better than Demerol," said Eldrēs.

"What do you mean? Morphine? That stuff makes me throw up."

"Forget drugs. I have futuristic techniques that from your point of view are indistinguishable from magic. I can help you."

Courane nodded. "But you want me to do something first," he said.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Naturally. But you'll be glad to do what I ask. It's just what you'd be doing if you were healed and at home. I want you to write a book."

"Here?" asked Courane. "In the hospital? Hooked up to machines? I need peace and quiet even at home; I can't have any distractions. I can barely *read* here, let alone do any writing."

"You'll do just fine, once you get used to the routine," said Eldrēs. "You've got your notebook and a pencil on your bedstand. What else do you need?"

Courane looked at her glumly. "I need an idea," he said.

Eldrēs waved a hand, dismissing his objection. "You have plenty of unwritten ideas in your notebook, you know. I want you to complete the manuscript of the sequel to *Space Spy*."

"*Time Spy*!" Courane looked startled. "How do you even know about it?"

"In my time, I'm sort of a literary historian. I'm doing my thesis on you and your books. I've read everything you ever wrote, including your unpublished work, your notebooks, and your letters. I know more about you than does anyone else in my era. It's very exciting for me to meet you in person. I feel as if I've known you for years."

"I'm flattered, but I don't think I can help you. I have worked out a vague plot outline for *Time Spy*, but it's nowhere near ready to work on. That's why I haven't written it already. I need to do a lot more thinking. I don't know who the characters are, or where it takes place. I don't even have subplots, just the main idea."

"I told you not to worry," said the woman from the future. "I've seen a finished manuscript of *Time Spy*. I can give you a detailed synopsis."

Courane just stared for a moment. "You've seen the finished book? How?"

Eldrēs sighed. "It would take too long to explain. It involves what seems to be a temporal paradox. Let's just say that I will, in fact, persuade you to write the book, and so I will have access to it in the future."

"Then why do you have to put me through all this now, when I'm feeling so terrible?"

"Because unless you actually do write it here and now, the manuscript in the future will cease to exist."

Courane felt he was missing something. "Then why not bring me the manuscript, and save me all the mental anguish of trying to create it the hard way."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I would if I could," she said. "But it can't be done. The continuum won't permit it."

"The continuum won't permit it," murmured Courane. "The continuum is going to see to it that I die a horrible death pretty damn soon. The hell with the continuum!"

Eldrēs put a hand on Courane's arm and looked at him sympathetically. "This must be hard on you," she said. "I have to go now. Think about what I said. I'll be back about 7:30."

Not long after Eldrēs left, a nurse's aide came by to take Courane's temperature and blood pressure. He let her wrap the sphygmomanometer around his free right arm. She pushed the thermometer between his lips. At least none of this hurt. She noted his blood pressure and his temperature on his chart and started to move off toward the next bed.

"Miss?" said Courane.

The nurse's aide gave him an impatient look. "Yes?"

"Would you tell the nurse that I'd like my shot now, please?" There was no room in the hospital's operating budget for luxuries like call buttons at every bedside.

She nodded. "I'll tell her when I see her," she said. Courane had to take every opportunity to get the message to the ward's head nurse. It usually took three or four requests before she actually arrived with the medication.

The ward was not a pleasant place to recuperate. There were twelve beds, six on each side of the aisle. Prisoners from Central Lockup filled four of them, handcuffed to their beds' side rails. Even the patients who weren't chained down were suspicious. Before his operation, Courane had had a small radio beside his bed. He liked to listen to the ball games in the afternoon. The radio had been stolen soon after he'd been taken down to surgery. On another occasion, when Courane had been wheeled downstairs for X rays, he came back to find his hairbrush and his shoes missing. Now the only personal possessions he kept were some paperbacks, a spiral notebook, and a pencil. He had learned that books were perfectly safe. No one here would have any use for a book.

Although it was only six o'clock, all the televisions had been turned on for the day. Eight of the patients had their own portable sets beside their beds, brought from home or on loan from relatives. It didn't seem to matter to the patients what was on. They watched anything, rarely

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

changing the channel. News programs, game shows, soap operas, kids' shows — Courane heard them all; he couldn't escape the cacophony. The televisions wouldn't be turned off until after midnight.

Suddenly Courane felt a sneeze coming on. He had a long incision in his chest and belly, pulled closed with metal staples rather than stitches. It ran from the tip of his sternum all the way to his pubes. A sneeze, a cough, even a hiccup, caused him agony. He pressed on his bandages with both hands and surrendered to the sneeze. The pain brought tears to his eyes. He held himself and moaned, wishing that the nurse would hurry with the Demerol.

All Courane had to look forward to was another day of boredom, loneliness, and desperation. He looked at his wristwatch: it was only 6:20. Time moved with the sluggishness one would expect in prison, or Hell. He was thinking just that thought, when a priest bent over his bed.

"How are you today, my son?" said the priest.

All the visiting clergy were so goddamn kindly, thought Courane. "Fine," he said. The priests didn't take it well when you complained to them.

"I'm glad," said the priest. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Well, actually, there is. On your way out, I'd be grateful if you'd ask the nurse if I can have my shot."

"You know, when you get out of the hospital, you won't be able to get those shots. You shouldn't start relying too heavily on drugs. You'll do better to look for the inner strength God has given you."

"Yes, Father. Would you ask the nurse, though?"

The kindly priest nodded. "Of course."

Courane looked at the priest's compassionate face, his own expression blank. Let me slash you up the middle, he thought, and we'll see what *your* inner strength is like. "Thank you, Father," he said.

"You know, you should get up and walk. It's the best thing for you. If you lie in bed too long, it will just make it harder for you later on."

"Yes, Father."

"I'll include you in my prayers, my son."

"Thank you, Father." The priest went on to the next patient. Courane checked his watch; it wasn't even 6:30 yet.

At seven o'clock a new patient was brought into the ward and put in the empty bed next to Courane's. "This is really disgusting," said one of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the orderlies, as he helped lift the unconscious man into the bed.

"You haven't worked here very long, if you think this is bad," said a second orderly.

"I've never smelled anything this bad in my life. Jeez, I'm glad I'm not going to have to bathe this sucker."

One of the men across the aisle complained. "That stinks," he said. "We don't want him here."

"Gangrene," said the second orderly. "The cops found this guy sleeping in a doorway. His leg will have to come off."

"I don't give a damn *what* his problem is," said the man across the aisle. "Get him out of here. Put him out in the hall or something."

The first orderly gave the patient a malicious grin. "If he wakes up, you can make friends. Sometimes you got to overlook something like a rotting leg. You can't hold that against him. I'm sure he wouldn't talk that way about your bullet wound."

"The bullet wound is my business," said the angry man. "I don't go pushing it on other people. That bum is inflicting his smell on everybody on this ward."

The two orderlies shrugged and headed toward the door.

"Orderly," called Courane. The stench of the man's gangrenous leg was almost suffocating, and Courane could barely breath without gagging.

"You want to complain, too, mister?" said the first orderly.

"My IV bag's running out," said Courane.

The orderly came over and examined the bag on the pole. "I'll tell the nurse," he said. He followed the other orderly out.

Courane grimaced; he should have asked the orderly to remind the nurse about the Demerol shot, too. In the meantime he turned his head and buried his nose in the pillow. It didn't provide much relief from the nauseating smell. He thought about how often the odor of gangrene had been described in other people's books as "sickeningly sweet." Those writers couldn't have had the opportunity to experience it like this. Courane knew now that no neat phrase could do it justice.

A little while later, Eldrēs returned and drew the curtains again. "How are we doing?" she asked.

"You sound like one of the residents," said Courane. "Can you do something about that awful smell?"

"Let's talk about that," she said. She perched on the very edge of his bed.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I can take your pain away, and neutralize anything else that's annoying you."

"Superdrugs from the future?"

She combed her white hair back and shook her head. "Just some creative past-altering. I can doctor details of this quasi-reality."

"Quasi-reality?" asked Courane. "What's quasi about it?"

Eldrēs shrugged. "I can shift you from one reality to another, nearly identical, one. One in which, for example, there's no putrid gangrene smell in the air. Or one in which you're recuperating exactly the same, only you don't hurt. Do you follow me?"

"You have this magical power, but you're going to use it only if I go along with what you want me to do. That means you're perfectly content to let me go on suffering if I don't cooperate. You don't have any qualms about withholding comfort from me."

"No qualms at all," said Eldrēs. "My field is minor twentieth-century genre writers, not ethics. You can go on suffering as much as you want, although I can't see why you'd make that choice. What I want isn't so terrible."

"You don't know how hard it is for me to write, even when I'm healthy and sitting at my desk, fully motivated."

"I'd think that what I'm offering you would be enough to motivate you."

Courane frowned. "I mean inspired. You're asking me to force a book into existence, something that I'm not at all ready to write. It won't turn out well; I can guarantee you that. It won't be writing; it'll be constructing, like putting together a model of a novel from your outline."

"That's all I want. The people in the future won't know the difference. And who's going to know? Besides me, I doubt if anyone else in my era has ever even realized your books exist."

Courane groaned. "First you tell me that I'm going to die a horrible death real soon now, and then you tell me that nothing I've done or written will be remembered. Why don't you leave me alone? Why don't you go bother somebody else? Gene Wolfe's a good writer. Go talk to him."

Eldrēs spread her hands. "I don't have to. Gene Wolfe is very popular in my time. He wrote some genuine classics."

"And *Space Spy*—"

"Let's say, to be charitable, that your best work has been somewhat neglected since your death."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Neglected," said Courane glumly.

"Totally and unmercifully out of print since a month after you passed away. There was a small piece in *Locus* about your death, and then your name was never again mentioned by anybody until I came along."

"Why did you choose me, then, if I'm such a nobody?"

Eldrēs smiled sadly. "There were only a handful of twentieth-century science fiction writers left to write about. Almost everybody else had been documented before my time."

"I was the bottom of the barrel, then," said Courane.

"Does it help any if I say that I think you've been unfairly ignored? That your stories are more entertaining than those of many other writers whose reputations lasted much longer?"

"To be honest, it doesn't help. I think I'm psychologically crippled now, thanks to you."

Eldrēs stood up and smoothed the covers. "You wouldn't want me to lie to you, would you?"

"It's too late now, anyway."

"Let's talk about happier things. Let's talk about what I can do for you here, and what finishing *Time Spy* will mean. For one thing, it will lead to a resurrection of interest in your work."

"I don't suppose you could manage a resurrection of *me*, personally."

"We do supertechnology," said Eldrēs, "not miracles."

"All right, I'll go along with you. What do I do?"

"Great!" said Eldrēs. She beamed at him. "I have a skeleton of the first chapter of *Time Spy*. Look it over, read the character sketches, and when you feel ready, just start writing in your notebook. You'll notice that as soon as you start to work, the pain from your incision will disappear, as well as the other small discomforts. That will last only as long as you're actually working. As soon as you stop, the pain will come back."

"That's blackmail," said Courane angrily.

"That's incentive," corrected Eldrēs. "I've got to go now. They're bringing you breakfast in a couple of minutes."

"Oh boy."

"Aren't you hungry?"

"You haven't seen the food here," said Courane.

"I'll check back with you in a little while to see how you're doing. Maybe we could get a chapter a day. That will finish the book in three

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

weeks, and the future will have a new minor masterpiece of science fiction to study. A lost classic of the Golden Age."

"I've never been able to write a chapter a day in my life. Even when I was rolling."

"We'll see," said Eldrēs confidently. "When you realize how much you hurt when you're not working, I think you'll find all sorts of new inspiration." She pulled back the curtain just as an orderly was coming toward Courane's bed with his breakfast tray. Eldrēs left; the orderly paid no attention to her as she walked by him on her way out.

"Mr. Courane," said the orderly. He put the tray on Courane's lap, nearly spilling its contents onto the bed.

"Thanks," said Courane. "About my shot—"

"The nurse knows. She'll get to you as soon as she can."

Right, thought Courane. He looked at the breakfast tray unhappily. The food in the charity hospital was the worst Courane had ever had, and he'd sampled institutional cooking at college, in the service, in jail, and in several other temples of healing. Breakfast, though, was the most reliable meal of the day. It was entirely recognizable, and therefore promised also to be edible.

Today, Courane had a plate of tepid grits, a hard-boiled egg, two slices of bacon, a pat of margarine and a cold piece of toast, and a carton of milk. He was hungry, because he hadn't eaten much of his dinner the previous night. It had been fried liver of an impenetrable toughness. With so many prisoners on the ward, knives were out of the question, and he could make no headway on the liver with the plastic spoon and fork he'd been given. He'd finally folded it into a slice of bread and made a sandwich, but he'd had as much trouble sectioning the meat with his teeth as he'd had with the plastic implements. When he'd finally succeeded, he quickly learned that it wasn't worth the trouble. He saw that most of the other patients on the ward had also passed on the fried liver.

This morning he ate the bacon first, then the egg. As he was opening the carton of milk, one of the orderlies passed his bed. "Is that an extra tray?" asked Courane.

"Yeah," said the orderly.

"Can I have it?"

"You want seconds?"

"Sure," said Courane. Better to fill up with genuine food now, in case

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

both lunch and dinner proved to be culinary disasters.

The orderly gave Courane the second tray, an unusual kindness. Of course, to remind him who was in charge on the ward, the orderly never returned to take the empty trays away. It took some painful maneuvering for Courane to slide the trays out of his way, toward the foot of the bed.

"You want me to move those for you?" asked Eldrēs.

"Would you?" said Courane.

She touched the emblem on her black outfit, and the trays disappeared. "Have you got any of the first chapter finished?" she asked.

Courane was astonished. "How did you make that stuff go away?"

Eldrēs smiled. "Wonders of the future," she said. "The same way I can make your pain go away. Have you done any work yet?"

"No," admitted Courane. "I was going to start right after breakfast. Well, actually, they're going to come by in a few minutes and change my linen, and that causes me a lot of pain. They have to move me into a chair, and it's like torture. Then I'll get a shot of Demerol soon, and by then I'll really need it."

"It won't do you any good," said Eldrēs. She was examining her long scarlet fingernails.

"What do you mean?"

She gave him an innocent look. "I think it will make my bargain with you so much more attractive if I neutralize the effects of the medication. You can take all the Demerol you want, but it won't ease the pain. If you want to stop hurting, you're just going to have to write this book. Writing is what you do, isn't it? You *enjoy* writing, don't you?"

"Sometimes I enjoy it," said Courane. "The rest of the time, I'd almost rather go out and change the piston rings on the Toyota. Once I start writing, it's wonderful, though. It's just that sometimes I know I can't do it anymore, that's all. It's like I forgot how, or all the creativity just leaked away somewhere. That's how I feel right now. As if whatever used to enable me to write was cut out of me with the tumor."

"That's nonsense," said Eldrēs.

"I know it sounds like nonsense, but it's how I *feel*. It's always been

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

this way. When I finish a book or a story, I can't understand how I accomplished it. I can't imagine how I could ever do it again."

"You're making too much of an intellectual hurdle for yourself. Don't try to analyze it, just do it. Just relax and let your subconscious mind work on Chapter One. Get some of it down on paper. I won't be able to help you feel better until I see something. Until then, I'm afraid you're going to have to suffer."

"It's pure cruelty, having the ability to relieve my pain and withholding it like that."

Eldrēs nodded. "Yes, that's what it is, all right. Cruelty can be fun, you know."

Courane felt a rush of anger. "You don't have to enjoy my misery," he cried.

"Why shouldn't I, if I get a little pleasure out of it?" she asked lightly.

"Then I'll be damned if I do anything for you!"

"As you wish," said Eldrēs. "But you'll see my way of thinking soon enough. It would be terrific if you could have ten pages done by lunchtime. Then I'd let you rest all afternoon. Take a long, deep sleep and wake up with no pain. Doesn't that sound more profitable than being obstinate with me?"

"I hate being manipulated," said Courane passionately.

"Too bad. I'm very good at it." Before he could say anything further, she was gone.

Just as he had predicted, a nurse's aide came by a few minutes later. She helped him to get slowly from the bed to a chair, where he sat carefully on the edge of the seat, panting in terrible pain, holding his wounded chest tightly with both hands. She stripped the bed quickly and put on clean sheets, then guided him back beneath the covers. His face was covered with sweat, and he felt faint. "Please," he murmured hoarsely, "tell the nurse. My shot."

"All right, Mr. Courane," said the nurse's aide, "but you can't keep bothering her like this. She has other patients she has to take care of."

"I know, damn it, but I haven't even seen her today. I haven't had a shot since two o'clock in the morning. It's almost two hours late. And my IV bag—"

"She knows about that, too. She'll get to it as soon as she can." The nurse's aide gave him a disgusted look, as if all of this were somehow

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his fault, and moved on to the next bed.

Courane lay in the bed, holding himself tightly and rocking slowly back and forth in time to the throbbing of his pain. He didn't know how much time passed, but after a while he heard a voice address him impatiently. "Mr. Courane?" it said. The tone was cold and disapproving.

"Nurse," he said. He kept his eyes closed.

"Your IV bag is empty. The blood vessel is blown. We're going to have to reset it."

"I know. I told someone about it a long time ago—"

"Let me have your wrist, Mr. Courane." The nurse worked quickly and efficiently, ripping off the adhesive bandage and pulling the needle free. She discarded the whole IV setup, pushing a new plastic tube into a cold bag of electrolyte solution, and connecting the tube's other end to a fresh needle. "Your other arm, please." Courane raised his right arm, and the nurse began searching for a likely vein. It took some time, and few searching stabs, before she seated the needle in a blood vessel. She taped the needle down to the back of his hand, and taped his hand and wrist to the plastic board. It was going to make it difficult to work, because he was going to have to write left-handed now.

"I have your pain shot, Mr. Courane. Which side?"

"Left," he said, and rolled over to present his naked hip. She swabbed his skin and gave him the injection. "Thank you," he murmured.

"You're welcome," said the nurse distractedly. When Courane opened his eyes, she was gone.

It usually took a few minutes before the Demerol hit. When it did, it was like the sun coming out from behind a mass of rain clouds, and Courane basked in the warmth and pleasant lassitude of the drug. He waited longingly for the first hint that the opiate was coming on. He felt nothing but the unending pain. He looked at his watch and realized that too much time was passing, that he ought to be feeling the effects of the injection by now. With a growing realization of horror, he knew that what Eldrēs had promised — had threatened — was true: the Demerol would be no good to him any longer. He could only wait in the piercing agony for relief that would never come. Not unless Eldrēs also spoke the truth about the other thing. And slowly, bitterly, he reached out for the notebook and the pencil.

The outline Eldrēs had given him for the first chapter said: *Introduce*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

protagonist, sketch setting, establish problem. That wasn't much to go on, thought Courane. After all, Eldrēs said she already had the complete novel in the future; surely she could provide him with a little more help in the present. When he'd scribbled the general idea for *Time Spy* in his notebook — a year ago? two years? — he'd done only the barest framework of story, with none of the important details, no subplots, no minor characters, not even a clever scene or an interesting chunk of dialogue. Eldrēs was asking a lot, expecting him to fill in all of that while he felt absolutely terrible, when he had no motivation at all to work on the book.

A sudden flash of pain reminded him that, after all, he did have motivation. In clumsy handwriting, he put a heading at the top of the first page of the notebook: *Chapter One.* Even when he was healthy, this was the most discouraging part of the book. There was so much more work to do before the pages began to take on the shape of a novel, before the characters resembled real human beings and the conflicts had meaning for the people in the story, and for the reader, too. All that existed now was a thick pile of blank pages that had to be filled up with words. Unhappily, Courane's mind felt as blank as the paper, empty of all inspiration.

Well, then, he'd write without waiting for inspiration. One of the first things he'd learned early in his career was that if he wanted to pay his rent and eat now and then, he surely couldn't afford to sit around until the Muses showed up to mop his brow. The next thing he'd learned was that if he just started describing a place or a person, very often he'd have the beginnings of a genuine story going within a few paragraphs, and all he had to do from that point was listen to the characters talk about what they needed and wanted.

What was a good name, now, for the main character? Eldrēs hadn't even given him that much. Mark something. Mark Abbott. Mark Cummings. Mark Molnar. Courane's mother had been Hungarian, and he always told himself that he should use more ethnic names. All right, Mark Molnar of the Time Patrol. What Time Patrol? There *had* to be a Time Patrol. What did they do? Simple enough: they patrolled time. Why? Because —

— because people need protecting, that's why. And the Time Patrol kept the time lines safe for democracy. The very existence of the Time Patrol presupposed the existence of somebody or something else who was gleefully screwing up the time lines.

Somebody, maybe, like Eldrēs, thought Courane.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

He considered that for a moment. Nah, he concluded. Eldrēs wasn't really the Dragon Lady type. Sure, she'd said that she enjoyed cruelty; but, really, Courane knew lots of people like that, although they wouldn't admit it so readily. He didn't believe she was capable of any real temporal vandalism.

That gave Courane an idea for the bad guy: Rack Packard, The Attila of Time. And all his little Huns.

It had everything: it had romance; it had danger; it had assonance and alliteration. It was disgusting.

Of course, it was only a preliminary approach to the first draft of a sketch of an outline for the first chapter; but already he sensed that *Time Spy* was not going to be a deathless classic of science fiction, despite what Eldrēs said about a Courane revival in the distant future. *Time Spy* would turn out to be a book of familiar character types driving so fast around the story's turns that the reader might never realize how disjointed and illogical the plot actually was. The secret was not to give the audience much of a straightaway, no time to catch its breath, no time to do any critical thinking.

With a sinking heart, Courane realized what *Time Spy* would be like: It would be just like *Space Spy*, a book that many people enjoyed, a book that no one remembered.

It did him no good to know that, for better or worse, he had worked up to his potential on *Space Spy*. His parents, his grade school teachers, and his ex-wife would have no cause to disparage him. They had always told him that if he worked hard and did all that he could, no one could ask for more. All anyone could expect from him was his best, and Courane had always given his best. He would go on giving his best in *Time Spy*, but he already knew what that would get him. *Time Spy* would be forgotten before it was created, a lost curiosity from an antique age for an academic scavenger like Eldrēs to pick over.

"Why bother?" murmured Courane. He coughed, and it was a moment before he realized that the cough hadn't caused him more searing agony. His eyes opened wider. Eldrēs had told him the truth. The pain had seeped away and left him feeling fine, perfectly well — not drugged and semiconscious, but as good as if he'd never had the surgery in the first place.

"See?" said Eldrēs, as she drew the curtains closed around the bed again.

"If I could patent this," said Courane, "I'd never have to write again."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Don't worry about it. Your writing days are almost over, anyway."

Courane glared at her. "You've got the worst bedside manner of anybody I've ever met."

She shrugged. "*In* bed I'm fine. Beside the bed, maybe I'm a little too blunt."

"Blunt," said Courane.

"So you tried working, and you found out I'm as good as my word. Extra-strength pain relief from the World of Tomorrow."

"That's just fine," said Courane, "but wouldn't it make it easier on both of us if you just gave me a peek at my finished manuscript? I mean, it *is* my work, isn't it? I don't understand—"

Eldrēs raised a hand to interrupt him. "I don't want you bringing that up anymore. I told you the story; I gave you my reasons. You take 'em or leave 'em; it's up to you. If you give me any more trouble, I can go get a previously unknown novel out of Sherman Ross Hladky."

"Who?" asked Courane, genuinely puzzled.

"Sherman Ross Hladky. The science fiction writer next on the list below you, as far as lasting contributions to popular literature go. He wrote *The Brain Feeders* and *Terror of the Mind Solvent*."

"Never heard of him."

"What can I say?" asked Eldrēs, spreading her hands. "You and Hladky have a lot in common."

"Hladky sounds Hungarian," said Courane thoughtfully.

"It wasn't his real name. He was born Roger Sherman Ross. He dropped the Roger and added the Hladky because he thought it would make his name more memorable."

"I guess he was wrong," said Courane.

"Well, what do you think?"

"Come back later, and I'll try to have some work finished for you."

"Good boy."

"Even when I'm perfectly healthy, you know," said Courane, "I don't write very fast. I aim at two or three thousand words a day. That's at home, comfortable, surrounded by all my office equipment and source material. Here on this ward with my belly ripped open, trying to work in pencil with one hand taped to a board, I don't expect I can keep up my regular pace."

"Speed isn't important," said Eldrēs. "Quality is more important. I need

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

something I can show my chief. If you give me a first-rate manuscript, it will drastically alter the way the future thinks of you. When it begins to think of you at all."

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "You have such a charming way of encouraging me," he said.

After Eldrēs left, he opened the notebook and looked at the scrap of outline. He felt oppressed. Despite his freedom from pain, he resented Eldrēs. She was bullying him, and he hated being bullied. She was right, though; there wasn't anything he could do about it. Not as long as she controlled him so thoroughly. The injections every four hours were supposed to dull the pain and keep him moderately comfortable. He could think of no way to explain his situation to the doctor or nurse — not without creating serious doubts about Courane's sanity.

He closed the notebook and put it back on the bedstand, then tried to relax. He closed his eyes, and quickly the pain began to increase. "Nurse!" he called loudly. Somebody on the ward was always yelling for the nurse. Now it was his turn.

As deplorable as the hospital was, Courane thought Eldrēs's intellectual tyranny was even more hateful. She was making him loathe his own talent and ability. He was a chronic procrastinator, and he often told people how much he actually detested writing. That wasn't true, of course; at least, it hadn't been until now.

He decided to rebel. He refused to let himself be shoved around any longer. Maybe Eldrēs thought she could make him jump through her circus hoop because she stepped out of his science fiction writer's fantasy. Courane had been startled at first, of course. Now he was disenchanted. Apparently, even in the radiant realm of the future, there were unwelcome and obnoxious people.

Lunch came, but he was in too much pain to even guess what was on the plate. The orderly took it back untouched. Much later the nurse came with a shot of Demerol. Once again, Courane waited in vain for the injection to take effect, for the opiate to obliterate his discomfort. Once again, it did not happen. He clutched the side rails of the hospital bed and told himself to bear up under the pain, to suffer through it with the kind of quiet courage his fictional protagonists had in such abundance. Courage wilted under torture, he discovered. Cursing and weeping, he put out his free hand and took the pencil and notebook. He took up Chapter One where he had left it.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"And how was your day?" asked Eldrēs sometime later.

"I'm hungry," said Courane.

"I knew you would be. I brought you something." She handed him a bag from Burger King.

Courane raised his eyebrows. In the bag were two bacon double cheeseburgers, a large order of fries, and a vanilla shake. "Thanks," he said. "It's just what I wanted. How did you know?"

She shrugged. "I asked you."

"You mean this afternoon? I don't remember you asking me about that."

Eldrēs shook her head. "No, about a week from now, your time. You met me today, but that doesn't mean I haven't visited you already somewhere else along your time line. In your future. And I have, several times."

"Why would you want to talk to me all out of order? It doesn't make sense to me."

"I can't tell you. You'll find out when you get there. Maybe I just wanted to find out how cooperative you were going to be. Maybe it was something else entirely. It's not important today. Eat your food."

The burgers were good, improved considerably by raw hunger and by the ugliness of everything else around him. "Well," he said, "thanks again."

Eldrēs reached across the bedstand and took the notebook. She opened it and began reading what he'd written that day. She nodded her head slowly. It made Courane feel uncomfortable, as if he were enduring some kind of audition or tryout. He waited for Eldrēs to respond in some way, to make some positive sign of enjoyment or unambiguous rejection. "I'm not reading this for fun," she said, without looking up, as if she'd read his mind. "This is business for me, not pleasure. I don't even really enjoy science fiction, you know."

"I like to have some kind of input," said Courane. "I'd like your reaction."

"My reaction doesn't matter. As long as you keep our bargain, I'll give you what I promised. My opinion of your writing isn't part of it. It's irrelevant."

"It's not irrelevant to me."

"Then take a look at this." She gave him a sheet of dark brown paper covered with pale yellow print.

"What is it?"

"A newspaper clipping. Our paper's been recycled so many times, it's almost black. Read it."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Courane looked up at her in astonishment. "It's a review of *Time Spy*. From The 115/31 *Daily Pansophist*. What's 115/31? A place?"

Eldrēs smiled. "In a way."

Courane stared at her for another moment, then he looked back at the review. "'Sandor Courane,'" he read aloud, "'was one of a number of fiction-creating independent laborers who flourished from the middle of the twentieth century until it became clear that consumers no longer needed their commodity. Courane himself was neither particularly skilled nor especially successful, even in his own lifetime. In the years since his death, both his name and his product have disappeared into oblivion. Lately, however, word has come from literary salvage operator Eldrēs that she is obtaining posthumously written bulk fiction from a Courane in a nearby quasi-reality. To prevent interference and maintain the integrity of Eldrēs's project, the IDS label of the quasi-reality is being kept secret.'"

"Bulk fiction?" objected Courane. "Is that what I'm turning out? It sounds like I'm operating a science fiction feed and grain store." He went back to reading. "'The first chapter of this new lot, to be titled *Time Spy* in its entirety, was logged yesterday. Initial reactions were cool.'" Courane looked up. "Is that all they've got to say? 'Cool'?" He tried to crumple the paper, but it wouldn't wad up. When he opened his hand, the paper flattened out again without so much as a wrinkle.

"Well," said Eldrēs, "it's only the first chapter. You can't expect them to get all excited over an early fragment."

"But I don't even have the whole first chapter written yet," he said, indicating the notebook.

"Uh-oh, watch out. You're trying to comprehend paradoxes again."

Courane got angry. "I'm not going to let you push me around anymore," he shouted.

The patient across the aisle rattled the chain on his handcuffs. "Break their face, white boy!" he called. The other patient couldn't hear Eldrēs, but he could hear Courane clearly enough.

"Take it easy," said Eldrēs soothingly.

"I don't care where you come from," said Courane hoarsely, still furious. "I don't care if you're from the Collection Agency from the End of Time, or Atlantis, or west of the goddamn moon. I don't care what you're selling, what tricks you can do, or what you can do for me. Maybe if you talked to me like a decent person and treated me like I had the least little

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bit of intelligence, I'd be prefectly happy to go along with you on this rotten book. But no, you come storming in here pulling your Agent of Destiny number. And you wonder why I'm not wearing out my pencil so all your friends in Tomorrowland can make undelighted comments about my work. You and your future can go to hell!"

Eldrēs leaned forward and put two fingers beneath Courane's jaw on the right side. With her other hand she touched the emblem on her breast. Immediately he was caught in a seizure of absolute anguish, of pain far greater than anything he'd ever experienced. Then, just as suddenly, she released him.

"All right?" she asked.

"I won't cooperate," he muttered through clenched jaws. "I'll suffer the pain. I'll go ahead and die rather than do what you want."

"That's simply not true, Courane," said Eldrēs. "You *know* it's not true. If you think about it for a moment, you'll admit to yourself that you're just not that brave. I don't really want to hurt you. I want you to finish *Time Spy* because it's your work, because it's something that you really want to do. And because, after all, this book will be your own best monument. You're creating your own memorial here. You have the chance to write a postscript to your life, with full knowledge of who'll be reading what you have to say about yourself. This is a gift to you, Courane, a precious gift, even if maybe you can't see it that way yet."

"What difference does it make, if *Time Spy* won't be any better than *Space Spy*, and nobody in your world has any respect for that book? Having you take my pain away is a good reason to work, but why should I worry about introducing myself to your friends? O.K., you mentioned monuments and memorials. Most markers in cemeteries are worn away by the weather, and if you can read them at all, they don't have any meaning to anybody but the immediate family. What I have to say in *Time Spy* won't have any signficance in your time line."

"Not until you carve out a new place for yourself," said Eldrēs. "Or renovate your old place. But set all that aside for a minute. Just for argument's sake, I'll grant your objection. Why else would you want to take my suggestion? What about self-respect? You know what's going to happen to you not long from now; I'd think you'd want to take this last chance. It's a crucial moment that only one person out of a billion gets to experience. Nevertheless, you'd be surprised how many ditch the chance. I don't know

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

why. Maybe eternal glory doesn't have as much allure as it used to, or else your fellows are immune to enticements. If that's the real reason, their resistance has rendered their entire lives pointless. Their careers and their body of work are now — that is, *will* be — even more obscure and disregarded than ever."

Courane stared up at the discolored ceiling tiles. "Tell me about the science fiction writers who went along with your other salvage operators. That's what they call you, isn't it? The writers weren't all trapped on charity wards like me. What did you do to persuade them?"

Eldrēs gave him a wan smile. "Oh," she said, "this and that. There's always a plan tailored to each primitive — I'm sorry about that, but the twentieth century is to us as the middle Middle Ages are to you."

"What about Hladky?"

She rubbed her forehead. "I think they got his favorite television program renewed for another season. It was really a terrible situation comedy, but it just goes to show you how versatile and powerful we are."

"Does he accept?"

"I don't remember. You were my project, and I didn't pay very much attention to anything else that was happening in this time line. We're wasting time now. I don't mean to come across as impatient, but —"

Courane interrupted her. "I've changed my mind," he said, "and it has nothing to do with your high-sounding talk about writing my own epitaph. It comes down to extortion. When I'm putting pages in the notebook, I feel better. It's as simple as that."

Eldrēs nodded. "Your ultimate motivation isn't important, as long as you complete the novel itself." She stood up and smoothed the covers on Courane's bed. "I'm going to leave now. I can stand to be in this century for only half an hour at a time. I'll look in on you later tonight, after twelve o'clock. You ought to be snoring away. If you're not, I'll make sure you fall into unbroken sleep with pleasant dreams."

"Thank you, Eldrēs," said Courane.

"You're welcome. I'll see you tomorrow." She went through the curtain, then came back almost immediately. "By the way," she said, "take a look at this." She handed him an old, dog-eared notebook.

He glanced through it. "Whose is this?" he asked.

"It's yours," she said. "It's very old."

"It's so old, I don't remember it at all. When did I write the entries in here?

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"According to my research, when you were between ten and twelve years old."

"So?"

"So when you finish *Time Spy*, you might want to start working on some of the ideas you'll find in this notebook. They're lumpish and rough, but of course you made the entries before you had any true sense of literary style. You've come a great distance since then."

Courane shook his head. "Why in hell would I even think about working on these? I have no intention of spending my last days reshaping these god-awful things."

Eldrēs gave him her brightest smile. "I'll tell you why," she said. "Because as long as you're scribbling, you're living. And you're not hurting."

"You mean, you can postpone my death?"

"That's right."

"For how long?" asked Courane.

She shrugged. "Indefinitely."

"Why?"

"It's very simple. If I can get a lot of new material from you, and if I can increase your reputation a hundredfold, it will increase my own reputation to the same degree."

"Ah," said Courane. "So much for the humanitarian kindness of our distant descendants."

"Live on, and free of pain," said Eldrēs.

Courane grimaced. "As long as I torment myself trying to make decent stories out of these horrible literary shards."

Eldrēs pointed directly at Courane's forehead. "But isn't that what you've always done for a living?"

"Not under this kind of pressure," he said.

"Write and live," said Eldrēs. "Your stories or your life."

Courane didn't say anything for a long while, until Eldrēs looked at him impatiently. "I'm thinking," he said mournfully. "I'm thinking."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

In this tale Brian W. Aldiss, who is renowned both as a writer and critic-historian of SF, draws upon folklore to weave a poignant tale concerning Sven the Sailor and his wife, Lise, and a love that is tested.

Traveler, Traveler, Seek Your Wife in the Forests of This Life

By Brian W. Aldiss

MY FRIENDS, THIS is a tale from the chilly north, concerning Sven the Sailor and his dear wife, Lise. Little is said of how Lise conducted herself through the years, but for Sven there was a time when everything he valued was at stake. And this is how it came about.

Many strange creatures live in the remote recesses of Scandinavia, even to this day, and some are older than mankind. The trolls are well known, but the *hulderfolk* are more frightening. Many times over, *hulderfolk* have tested the sanity and integrity of mankind. Many times over, humans have wandered into the forests of the north and never appeared again, lured away by *hulderfolk* and their evil magics.

Sven the Sailor was a handsome and carefree youth who led a merry

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

life before he came to marry his Lise. Lise was from the town, a beautiful and fair-haired girl, sturdy of limb and with a golden singing voice. Before she would marry Sven, she made him swear on all he held holy that he would reform his idle life and become a worthy member of the community. Sven could only agree.

"No more philandering. This I swear by your sacred life," Sven said, sinking on one knee and clutching her gown.

She could scarcely reply, for the seriousness of his oath brought fear to her heart.

Sven and Lise lived together in a cottage in a village at the foot of the Wonderment Mountains. Happy though they were, Sven could not entirely conquer his roving habit. When brief summer came to the northern wildernesses, he would kiss Lise's sweet, moist lips and go up into the mountains, there to work as a lumberjack or trapper, as the fancy took him.

A boy was born to them who rejoiced Lise's heart. He proved loving and joyous, and worshiped his father. Whenever Sven returned from the recesses of the mountains, he would whistle as he walked down the lane, and, at the sound of the whistle, Little Sven would come running, for all the world like a faithful dog. And he would cry with joy as Sven and Lise fell into a loving embrace.

Much though Sven loved his wife and his son, it seemed he was unable to stay confined at home. Next summer saw him back among the countless trails that wandered through the forests of the Wonderment Mountains, where for mile after mile not another human was to be seen, and the living presence of the pines silenced the solitary traveler.

One evening, as the sun set, Sven found himself alone in a particularly lonely part of the forest. Tired and thirsty, he found a small spring running under a rock. There, lying prone, his ax beside him, he drank. When he rose to his feet again, he saw nearby a prosperous farm where he would have sworn no farm existed a moment before.

In his superstitious heart, Sven thought that this must be a farm belonging to the *hulderfolk*. He wished then that he had never left Lise and Little Sven.

A woman appeared at the farmhouse door and called a greeting. Although he was filled with heavy dread, Sven felt himself attracted. Forgetting his ax, he allowed himself to draw near through the gathering dusk.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Remaining where she was, just inside the farmhouse door, the mysterious woman raised a lantern, so that its beams fell on her face. He saw there dark hair curling over a fine forehead; beautiful features; and small, pearly teeth, revealed when she smiled. Her smile was one of unearthly sweetness. Her look was both demure and cunning, as she beckoned him into the farmhouse.

Inside the building, darkness reigned, scarcely mitigated by the lantern. By the sullen red light of a fire, Sven could glimpse strange trophies hanging on the walls, horned things, and things of fur, packed so close and giving such a wild atmosphere to the room that he could hardly convince himself that he was not, even now, standing in a forest clearing.

A small girl squatted by the hearth where the fire glowed, playing with a hound. The hound turned growling toward Sven, its eyes in the gloom nothing more than scarlet disks. The woman with the light ordered it to be silent, and told the child to draw some ale for their visitor. This the girl did, in a coquettish way, brushing against Sven rather familiarly, as if they shared a secret.

Sven sat down on a bench as invited. Something scuttled away in the dark. He could not see what it was. The woman stood the lantern on the table, composed herself near him, and encouraged him to talk.

He remained ill at ease, for there was a smoky quality to the air that made everything hard to see. Nevertheless, the woman's gestures, her conversation, went to his head. He began slowly to lose his caution. About them, as they spoke and drew imperceptibly nearer to each other, the world was silent. It was as if all its clocks had stopped, and the globe itself had ceased its motion at midnight. Seldom did a sound penetrate from outside, except for the infrequent clatter of hoof on cobble, where a *hulderhorse* was tethered by the front door.

Of the army of trees outside, nothing could be seen. Night filtered through the forest like an overwhelming sea.

Sven clearly recalled uncanny tales of *hulderfolk*, and of how time passed at a different rate in their world from the ordinary world, so that no man-made clock — so said the legends — could ever function in a *hulder-home*. He well recalled such tales, yet he took more ale and ignored his inner warnings. Under the charm of this strange lady's presence, he even forgot about his fair young wife and his son.

When she laughed prettily at something he said, showing those white

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teeth, Sven leaned across the table and clutched the *hulderwoman's* hand.

"Are you alone here? Where is your man?" His voice was husky.

She laughed sweetly and said, "Oh Sven, don't say you can have forgotten!"

These words, so prettily uttered, struck into the center of his being. He was overcome by a paralyzing emotion, in which regret and self-reproach and longing were all mingled. He began to tremble, and could only repeat stupidly, while staring down at the rough grain of the table, "Where is your man?"

She was silent so long that he was forced to look up at her, and into her eyes, which were filled with tears. Then she spoke softly and teasingly.

"Can you really have forgotten, Sven?" She rested a hand on his arm, as if in reproach. "Is our past nothing to you? This little miss you see here is your daughter. Can you not see how closely she resembles you?"

Words would not leave his mouth. Bemusedly, he attempted to beckon the little girl over to him. But her mother spoke sharply to her and ordered her off to bed.

The girl left without a word. The hound followed, slinking away with a backward look.

The woman got up from the bench and stood by him, to regard him with a strange expression. She was no longer smiling. He looked up at her with pounding heart, awaiting her next move. For a moment, both of them were completely still.

She made a slight but erotic gesture, as though to herself, as though to her body.

"Now we can go to bed," she said.

Sven lowered his gaze to the floor.

"I — I am already married. My wife is waiting for me in the valley."

"Oh Sven!" She moved close to him. He heard the swish of her skirt. She stroked his cheek, speaking in the tenderest of voices. "Do you not remember a dream you had many years ago, in the days when you were yet a sailor, Sven? Do you not remember that you met the loveliest woman you had ever known? Why, you embraced her all one lovely summer's night, when a moon hung low over the whispering lake. Do you not remember all that?"

When he did not reply, she went on.

"And next day you married that lady you loved so much. Do you not remember?"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

It seemed to Sven that that phrase "Do you not remember?" was the cruelest he had ever heard. Still she was speaking, describing the place where they had lived.

"And then that woman you loved so much bore you the fairest child you ever saw, a girl. What happiness! . . . Then the captain came, and you sailed away — never, ever to return. Do you not remember?"

Every phrase she uttered carried a burden of infinite regret. He stared openmouthed and disconsolate about the room. It was filled with night and mist. In his wild grief, it seemed to him that he could see through the walls of the farmhouse to the tall surrounding trees. They oppressed him like lost days.

"Yes, yes, I do remember," he cried. "It was all as you say, everything, everything. All night long we were together, and the moon took its fill of the lake as I took my fill of you. It broke my heart to sail away, and the waves heard my weeping. I could not bear to leave you. Every night in my hammock on the far seas, I cried for you and for our dear child."

As he was speaking, tears burst from his eyes again. Tremendous sobs shook him.

He wished to say, I cry not like a man but like a child — and all this for a dream. The words would not come from his throat.

She put her arms about him, saying, "It was no dream, Sven. That was your real life, Sven. It is everything that has happened since that has been the dream. Now you are once more awake, and we two are together, just as before."

"Can it really be? Then why do I weep?"

"You weep for lost time."

"Can it really be?"

"Come to bed with me, and you will see."

The woman began to undress. In the dim light of the lantern, he saw the beauty of her breasts and her body as it was revealed more fully. He could not breathe for the loveliness of what he glimpsed. As her garments were thrown across the table, he caught the fragrance from them. He was in a spell.

Enchanted, he moved toward her. As he moved, the silence was sharply broken. An owl shrieked outside. Pausing, he heard its cry: "Lise, Lise, sailor, remember Lise!"

A groan escaped him. Uttering his wife's name, "Lise!", he was free of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the spell. He turned about. She, too, turned, quick as a striking snake.

As he ran for the door, stumbling in the dark, the *hulderwoman* was transformed, turning in the twinkling of an eye into a ferocious creature of horns and bristling fur, which rushed toward him swinging an ax.

He dodged it. As the ax bit into the door post, he flung open the door and half-fell outside. Unleashing the horse that stood by the threshold, he jumped on its back and galloped away. Once he looked back. The *hulder-farm* had vanished. Nothing stood there but somber trees.

The *hulderhorse*, too, vanished. Suddenly he was sitting on nothing. He fell, pitching into a deep ditch full of pine needles. Unhurt, Sven was immediately up and running, running, running from that unhallowed spot.

"I was tempted, but I did not break my oath," he told himself aloud, over and over. "I swore by the sacred life of Lise, and I did not betray her quite."

He cursed the *hulderwoman's* trap as he ran on, yet still some traitorous thing in his head repeated, "What is life? What is dream?"

All through the brief northern night, he ran, down through the aloof aisles of forest, down through the mountains, down into the valley, toward his own cottage. As he got to the lane, he paused, leaning against a post, to get back his breath. Then he whistled as he always did.

Little Sven did not come.

He whistled again. To his surprise, he saw a bent, middle-aged man leave his gate, give him an angry glance, and then proceed hurriedly in the other direction toward the village. Rather alarmed, Sven hurried to his cottage, which he now observed was in a dilapidated state, with the roof much in need of repair. No smoke came from the chimney.

Trepidation overwhelmed him, but Lise was still there. She came slowly out to greet him. She dropped her stick and let her shawl slip from her shoulders in joy at his arrival.

"So you returned to me at last, you wanderer," she said.

"I kept my word to you," he said, and added, "Just."

Her face knit into a mass of wrinkles as she smiled up at him. He clutched her age-dried figure, ran his hand over her gray hair, and then kissed his wife on her parched and withered lips.

"Come in," she said, in a pleading voice.

He followed her stooped figure up the path and into the chillsome cottage.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SCIENCE

ISAAC ASIMOV

OUT OF THE EVERYWHERE

THERE IS no secret about the fact that I do not view President Reagan's "Star Wars" fantasy in any favorable way. My own feeling is that it is the wish fulfillment dream of a shallow mind and that it cannot possibly work either technologically or politically.

Naturally, being a rational man, I know that it is conceivable that I may be wrong, but, as of now, I don't think I am. I have written essays giving my reasons in detail, so I'm not going to do so here. Instead, I will tell you a small incident that came to my mind a few days ago.

At a Nebula Awards banquet some two years since, I was accosted by a fellow science-fiction writer of far-right persuasion.

"Hey, Asimov," he said, belligerently, "why are you against the Strategic Defense Initiative?" (That's Pentagonese for Star Wars.)

I felt a little uneasy. The gentleman questioning me was larger than I, stronger than I, rather drunk, and a well known apostle of the righteousness of violence. However, I didn't see my way clear to denying my beliefs, so I said, as calmly as I could, "Because I don't think it will work."

Whereupon my friend rattled off the names of a number of scientists and said, "These people all believe it will work. Do you doubt their expertise?"

"Not at all," I said. "What I doubt is their sanity."

That left him speechless for a few moments and, under the cover of the silence, I slipped away.

It is always with relief, then, that I remember that there are many aspects of science that do not involve political rhetoric. For instance —

The story I am now about to tell you begins in the late 1700's, when a French physicist, Charles Augus-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tin Coulomb (1736-1806), noted that if an electrically charged object was suspended by a silk thread it very slowly lost its charge. The charge could not very well leak away through the silk thread since silk is an excellent non-conductor of electricity. Coulomb thought, therefore, that it must quietly and slowly leak away into the air. He was correct, but he didn't know how that happened.

There was no answer to the question until radioactivity was discovered in 1896. Radioactive atoms are sources of energetic radiation, and such energetic radiation (whether consisting of fast moving particles or ultra-short waves) would collide with atoms, forcing the transfer of electrons and thus producing atoms with a positive or negative electric charge ("ions"). These ions could interact with an electrically charged object, neutralizing the charge.

Of course, one had to be certain as to whether the ions were really produced by radioactive materials, present in traces almost everywhere in the soil, or were, somehow, produced naturally by the atmosphere.

Shortly after the turn of the century, a Scottish physicist, Charles Thomson Rees Wilson (1869-1959), tested the matter by suspending a charged object in a deep railroad tunnel. the object, he found, lost charge just as it would at the surface.

That meant it was not likely that the ions arose as a result of some property in the atmosphere itself, since the vast bulk of the atmosphere was out of reach of the discharging object. The ionization had to result from the presence of trace radioactivity in the rocks all about.

In 1911, an Austrian physicist, Victor Franz Hess (1883-1964), thought the matter could be checked in the opposite sense. Instead of going deep underground to get away from the atmosphere and showing that charge leakage did not stop, why not go high above ground to get away from the soil and rock and show that charge leakage *did* then stop. There was no point in going up into the heights by climbing a mountain, of course, since then the ground rose with you. One would have to go up in a balloon.

Hess made ten balloon ascensions, therefore, five by day and five by night (and one of the daylight ascensions was carried out during a total eclipse of the Sun). The results he got were unequivocal — and totally unexpected. Although everyone was convinced radioactivity in the soil produced the atmospheric ions and the charge leakage, going up in the air and removing one's self from the soil by

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

some miles actually led to an *increase* in the rate of charge leakage. The higher one went, the greater the rate of charge leakage.

The soil and its radioactivity might produce atmospheric ions, but so must some mysterious radiation present in the upper atmosphere.

Hess hadn't the slightest idea of what the radiation might be, so he called it simply "Hohenstrahlung" (German for "radiation of the heights").

As the years went by, however, it became clear that this radiation of the heights came from beyond the atmosphere, from outer space. What's more, it came not from any specific direction, say from the Sun, but from all directions equally. It came from the everywhere into the here; it came from the Universe or Cosmos generally.

Recognizing this fact, the American physicist Robert Andrews Millikan (1868-1953) suggested, in 1925, that the radiation be called "cosmic rays," and that suggestion caught on.

The next question is: What are cosmic rays?

To begin with, all that was known about cosmic rays was the fact that they were extraordinarily penetrating, but that, in itself, was not sufficient to define their nature.

In general, there are two kinds of radiation: 1) streams of particles, and 2) waves. Almost every form of radiation has had a particle vs. wave controversy.

Sound and light turned out to consist of waves. Cathode rays and positive rays turned out to consist of particles; of electrically charged particles at that. Then came X-rays, and they were waves. Of the radioactive radiations, alpha rays were streams of positively charged particles, beta rays were streams of negatively charged particles and gamma rays were waves.

These are not all independent phenomena. Light, X-rays and gamma rays are all examples of electromagnetic radiations (as are ultraviolet, infrared, and radio waves). Cathode rays and beta rays each consisted of streams of fast moving electrons. Alpha rays and positive rays each consisted of streams of fast moving nuclei.

Of these, gamma rays were the most penetrating. They consisted of electromagnetic waves that were exceedingly short and therefore of very high frequency. Since cosmic rays were even more penetrating than gamma rays, might cosmic rays be of even shorter length and higher frequency?

Or might it be that cosmic rays were particles more massive or speedier (or both), and, therefore, of higher kinetic energy, than any

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other particle streams known?

The problem of distinguishing between the two alternatives was made particularly difficult by the fact that, under careful observation, the difference between particles and waves blurred. In 1905, for instance, the German-born physicist Albert Einstein (1879-1955) showed that light waves had their particle aspects. As particles, they were called "photons" from the Greek word for "light."

As time went on, it was found that every wave had its particle aspect, and every particle had its wave aspect. Nor was there any use in asking, "Which is it *really*?" It is neither, really; it is both. However, any particular observation you make will demonstrate either the wave aspect or the particle aspect, never both. This is called the principle of complementarity and was advanced by the Danish physicist Niels Henrik David Bohr (1885-1962).

The more energetic a wave and the shorter its wavelength, the more prominent the particle aspect is. In 1923, the American physicist Arthur Holly Compton (1892-1962) showed that in the case of X-rays, for instance, the particle aspect was much more prominent than it was for the less energetic photons of visible light. This was called the "Compton effect," and for it he received a share of the 1927 Nobel Prize in physics.

If, then, cosmic rays consisted of ultra-short waves, sufficiently ultra-short to account for their penetrability, then their particle aspect ought to be so prominent that casual experiments would only detect the particle aspect. How could one tell, then, whether cosmic rays were waves acting like particles, or were "real" particles?

There is, as it happens, one difference. All the particles known to science in the 1920's carried an electric charge as an integral characteristic, a charge that was either positive or negative. (There are streams of uncharged particles, too, as, for instance, neutrons and neutrinos, but they weren't known in the 1920's.)

None of the waves known in the 1920's (or today, for that matter), whether electromagnetic waves or any other kind, carried any electric charge.

So it boiled down to this: Did cosmic rays carry an electric charge and were they therefore particles; or did they not and were they therefore waves?

As sometimes happens in the history of science, two scientists of roughly equal ability and reputation took up opposite sides of the question and fought the matter vigorously.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Millikan thought that cosmic rays were uncharged electromagnetic waves of unprecedentedly short wavelength and high frequency. He thought they were produced in the process of the creation of matter in the far reaches of the Universe and were, so to speak, the "birth cry" of matter.

Compton, on the other hand, was less dramatic and simply thought that cosmic rays were streams of extraordinarily energetic charged particles.

Thoughts and opinions don't count, however. To settle this matter, evidence was needed; appropriate observations had to be made.

As it happens, Earth has a magnetic field. Electromagnetic waves, plunging out of space toward Earth's surface, would pass through the field but be unaffected by it. In that case, all parts of Earth's surface would be bombarded by cosmic rays equally.

Charged particles, plunging out of space toward Earth's surface, would be affected by the field in such a way that they would be made to curve toward the magnetic poles. To be sure, cosmic rays are so energetic and travel so quickly that their curvature in response to Earth's not-terribly-strong field is not very much — but it ought to be measurable. And in that case, Earth's higher latitudes, north and south, ought to be subjected to a slightly more intense cosmic ray bombardment than would Earth's lower latitudes near the equator.

In the interest of research, Compton became a world traveller, measuring the intensity of cosmic ray bombardment at different latitudes. Before the end of the 1920's he showed that the "latitude effect" *did* exist and that the cosmic rays therefore must consist of electrically charged particles.

The latitude effect, in itself, did not distinguish between positive and negative charges. In 1930, however, the Italian physicist Bruno Benedetto Rossi (b. 1905) pointed out that positive charges ought to be deflected eastward and negative charges westward. The east-west distribution was studied, and it became clear that cosmic ray particles were positively charged.

At that time, the only positively charged particles known were atomic nuclei. The proton was the nucleus of the hydrogen atom; the alpha particle, the nucleus of the helium atom; and more complex positively charged particles were the nuclei of more complex atoms. However, let's leave the actual make-up of cosmic ray particles for later on and turn now to the uses of cosmic rays.

In the 1930's and 1940's, cosmic

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ray particles were far more energetic than anything in the way of particles or waves that could be produced in the laboratory. This meant that for something like a quarter of a century, a deeper understanding of nuclear physics depended on cosmic ray observations.

In 1930, for instance, the English physicist Paul Adrien Maurice Dirac (1902-1984), as a result of certain theoretical studies, suggested that subatomic particles might exist that were the mirror images (so to speak) of particles that were already known. For instance, the electron might have a mirror image, an "antielectron", that would be identical to the electron in all its properties except that it would have a positive charge rather than a negative one.

No such antielectron was known in nature, and Dirac's suggestion was not taken very seriously at first.

However, an American physicist, Carl David Anderson (b. 1905), was, at this time, working with Millikan and studying cosmic rays at mountain heights where they were particularly intense.

Anderson was working with cloud chambers, devices that marked the path of charged particles by a line of tiny water droplets. Since the devices were placed in a magnetic field, the charged particles followed a curve. From the nature of the curve, from the density of the drops, and from other characteristics, a skilled observer like Anderson could tell at a glance what was happening inside the chamber.

But cosmic ray particles themselves, and those they produced by collision with the molecules of the atmosphere, were so energetic and speedy that they produced paths that hardly curved at all.

Anderson therefore placed a lead bar across the middle of the cloud chamber. The particles associated with cosmic ray activity were energetic enough to smash into the lead bar and force their way through. In the process, however, they lost much of their energy. When they emerged, therefore, their paths curved more sharply in response to the magnetic field.

One such curve, noted by Anderson in August, 1932, was easily recognized as that of an electron — but one that *curved in the wrong direction.* It was a positively charged electron, one of Dirac's antielectrons. (Anderson, unfortunately, called it a "positron" and the name stuck, but, properly speaking, it is an antielectron.)

The antielectron indirectly demonstrated the existence of all other antiparticles and of "antimatter" itself.

Now Dirac's work suddenly gain-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ed enormous significance, and he received the Nobel Prize for physics in 1933.

Here's another example. By 1932, it was known that, except for the simplest atomic nucleus of all, that of hydrogen-1, atomic nuclei were made up of a number of protons and neutrons, all squeezed together into a tiny object only a ten-trillionth of a centimeter across — a diameter only 1/100,000 that of an atom.

This created a prime puzzle. Neutrons, which had just been discovered, were much like protons, but they were electrically neutral (hence their name) and carried no charge. Neutrons did not attract each other and neither did they attract protons. Protons, on the other hand, all carrying positive charges, repelled each other violently.

If the particles within a nucleus showed no attractions among themselves, and *did* show repulsion, what kept them together?

Obviously, there *had* to be an attractive force present, and it had to be far stronger than the electromagnetic interaction that caused protons to repel each other. This attractive force came to be called the "strong interaction" therefore, and it proved to be over a hundred times as strong as the electromagnetic interaction.

But how did the strong interaction work? By that time, it was felt that interactions worked by means of "exchange particles." That is, particles of certain types exchanged other particles constantly and rapidly so that the result was an attraction or sometimes, a repulsion. Thus, the electromagnetic interaction, which could show either attraction or repulsion, was mediated by the rapid exchange of photons, while the gravitational interaction, which showed attraction only, was mediated by the rapid exchange of gravitons.

If an exchange particle had no intrinsic mass, then the result was a "long range interaction." Thus, since photons and gravitons have no intrinsic mass, the electromagnetic and gravitational interactions declined in intensity only as the square of the distance and could make themselves felt over astronomical distances.

The Japanese physicist Hideki Yukawa (1907-1981) tackled the problem of the atomic nucleus and its strong interaction. That strong interaction dropped so rapidly with distance that it could barely reach across the width of a nucleus and was not felt at all outside the nucleus. (That is why nuclei have to be so small.) In order for an interaction to be so short range, the exchange particle must have mass.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Indeed, by 1935, Yukawa had estimated that the exchange particle must have a mass roughly 200 times that of an electron, or 1/9 that of a proton. Such a particle of intermediate mass came to be called a "meson" from a Latin word for "intermediate."

Again, no such intermediate sized particle was known, but almost at once, Anderson, still studying the tracks produced by cosmic rays, detected such a particle. (For this and for the earlier antielectron, Anderson got the Nobel Prize for physics in 1936.)

Anderson's particle was a meson, all right, in terms of mass, for it was 207 times as massive as an electron. It was not Yukawa's meson, however, since it didn't interact with protons and neutrons at all, and Yukawa's meson would have had to interact eagerly.

In 1947, however, an English physicist, Cecil Frank Powell (1903-1969), discovered a slightly more massive meson, 273 times as massive as an electron, among the debris produced by cosmic ray particles, and that *was* Yukawa's meson. As a result, Yukawa received the Nobel Prize for physics in 1949, and Powell received it in 1950.

The two mesons, Anderson's and Powell's, were naturally given different names. Each was given a Greek letter prefix. Anderson's became the "mu-meson" and Powell's the "pi-meson."

The mu-meson turned out to be identical to the electron in every respect except for its greater mass. This puzzled physicists and still does, for there seems no reason for the mu-meson's existence. As the Austrian-American physicist Isidore Isaac Rabi (1898-1988) said, on considering the mu-meson, "Who ordered that?"

Indeed, such is the close identification of the mu-meson with the electron, and so fundamentally different is it from the pi-meson and other mesons since discovered, that the mu-meson is no longer even called a meson. Its name has been condensed to "muon" and, of course, just as there is an antielectron, so is there an "antimuon." And just as the electron and antielectron are closely associated with "electron neutrinos" and "electron antineutrinos", so are muons and antimuons associated with "muon neutrinos" and "muon antineutrinos."

Electron neutrinos and muon neutrinos are both without mass and without charge and, indeed, have no distinguishing characteristics we know of, but they do not substitute for each other in nuclear reactions so there must be *some* difference.

In 1977, a still more massive

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

electron was discovered. It would have been called the "tau-meson" at an earlier time, but now it is simply called the "tauon." It is about 3500 times as massive as an electron (and, therefore, twice as massive as a proton), but it still has all the electron's properties otherwise. There is also an "antitauon" and, of course, a "tauon neutrino" and a "tauon antineutrino."

The electron, muon, and tauon, with their neutrinos and antiparticles, make a total of twelve particles in all that are lumped together as "leptons." This is from a Greek word for "weak," because these particles are not subjected to the strong interaction, but to a much weaker, even shorter range, force called the "weak interaction."

These twelve leptons may be all there are of this variety of particle. They all seem to be fundamental particles in that they don't appear to be made up of still simpler entities (as protons, neutrons and pi-mesons are).

Now let's get back to cosmic rays.

Cosmic rays approaching Earth from outer space are speeding atomic nuclei. This is the "primary radiation." The primary radiation doesn't reach us down here at the surface, however. It strikes the upper atmosphere, smashes into its atoms, and produces speeding "secondary radiation." It is this secondary radiation that reaches us, and it is mostly in the form of muons.

Here we have a puzzle. The muon can be produced by nuclear reactions in the laboratory, and we can note the length of the path that a muon takes through a detecting device. After it travels a short distance, its path is converted into one that is typically that of an electron. The conclusion is that a muon is unstable and, after a short period of time, decays into an electron (which is stable). From the length of the muon's path and its velocity, we calculate that its lifetime is about 2.2 millionths of a second.

Now how much distance can a muon travel before it is converted to an electron? That depends on its speed, but even if it travels at the speed of light, the fastest possible, it can only cover a distance of 660 meters (2/5 of a mile) before changing into an electron. Yet the muons are formed many miles high in the atmosphere. How can they possibly survive long enough to reach the surface?

That's where Einstein's theory of special relativity comes in. Einstein suggested that as velocities increase, lengths in the direction of velocity decrease. At ordinary velo-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cities that are only a small fraction of the speed of light, the decrease is immeasurably small. As velocities increase, the decrease in distance becomes noticeable, and at nearly the speed of light, distances become very short.

A meson in the laboratory moves comparatively slowly so that it travels only a very short distance before decaying. A meson hurled downward by a cosmic ray is travelling at very nearly the speed of light, and the distance between itself and the Earth's surface shrinks to less than a hundred meters so it has plenty of time to reach the surface before decaying.

But that's the way it looks to the *muon*. To us, the distance seems to be many miles, so why is it *we* see the muon make it?

Well, another part of Einstein's theory says that when an object is moving very rapidly relative to ourselves, the passage of time on that object seems to us to slow down. At speeds near the speed of light, time seems to creep.

Since the muons are travelling at nearly the speed of light, the rate of time passage for them seems to *us* to be very slow, and the allotted 2.2 millionths of a second stretches out to a hundred-fold and more, giving the muon ample time to reach the ground before its far extended lifespan comes to an end.

The mere fact, then, that the secondary radiation of muons reaches us is a strong confirmation of Einstein's theory of relativity.

What's more, this business about a shortening distance and a slowing rate of time (and an increasing mass also, by the way) is unbreakably linked with the further consequence of the theory that the speed of light in a vacuum is an absolute maximum for any object possessing mass (objects such as ourselves and our spaceships).

Suppose, then, that someone says to you, "How do you know that we can't go faster than the speed of light? They broke the sound barrier and someday they'll break the light barrier."

In that case, you can answer, "The mere fact that the muons are formed high in the atmosphere and reach us unchanged here at the surface of the Earth demonstrates that we can't move faster than the speed of light in a vacuum." (Of course, you will then have to explain why one implies the other, and this might take time.)

In the 1950's, physicists worked up particle accelerators that could produce speeding particles so energetic that there was no longer any necessity of turning to cosmic rays as the only phenomenon energetic enough to answer questions arising

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

out of nuclear physics.

This, however, did not wipe out interest in cosmic rays. The emphasis merely shifted. Instead of concentrating on the nuclear reactions that cosmic rays can induce, scientists began wondering about what cosmic rays would tell us of the outer Universe.

We pass, in other words, from the unimaginably small to the unimaginably large — but we do it next month.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO SUBSCRIBERS ON THE MOVE

If you are planning a change of address please notify us as far in advance as possible, and allow six weeks for the change to become effective.

Be sure to give us both your old and new address, including the zip codes. Print clearly and, if possible, attach an old mailing label.

OLD ADDRESS
(attach label here if available)

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____
(please print)

NEW ADDRESS

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

SUBSCRIPTION SERVICE,
Mercury Press, Inc., PO Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sam Gunn — thief, liar, warmonger, according to one opinion. An energetic, loquacious wheeler-dealer, from another perspective. With Sam Gunn, Ben Bova ("Crisis of the Month," March 1988) has created one of his most memorable and likeable characters. And here is the story of how he came to be known as "Diamond Sam."

DIAMOND SAM

By Ben Bova

"A THIEF," SAID GRIGORI Aleksandrovich Prokov. "A thief and a blackmailer."

He said it flatly, without emotion, the way a man might observe that the sky is blue or that grass is green. A fact of life. He said it in excellent English, marred only slightly by the faint trace of a Russian accent.

The reporter wrinkled her nose slightly. There was neither blue sky nor green grass here in the Leonov Center for Retired Heroes of the Soviet Union, but there was a distinctly earthy odor to the place.

"Sam Gunn," Prokov muttered. Then he gave a disdainful snort. "Not even the other capitalists liked him!"

They were sitting on a bench made of native lunar stone, near the edge of the surface dome, as far away from the yawning entrance to the underground retirement center as possible. The floor of the dome was bare lunar rock, glazed by plasma torches and smoothed to a glass finish. She wondered how many elderly Heroes of the Soviet Union slipped and broke

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

their necks. Was that their government's ultimate retirement benefit?

The wide curving window in front of the bench looked out on absolute desolation: the barren expanse of the Ocean of Storms, a pockmarked, undulating surface without a single sign of life as far as the eye could see. Above the strangely near horizon, though, hung the tantalizing blue- and white-streaked globe of Earth, a lonely haven of color and life in the stark, cold darkness of space.

For the tenth time in the past ten minutes, the reporter fumbled with the heater control of her electrified jumpsuit. She felt the chill of that merciless vacuum seeping through the tinted glass of the big window. She strained her ears for the telltale hiss of an air leak. There were rumors that maintenance at the Leonov Center was far from top-rate.

Prokov seemed impervious to the cold. Or perhaps, rather, he was so accustomed to it that he never noticed it anymore. He was very old, his face sunken in like a rotting jack-o'-lantern, and wrinkled even across his utterly bald pate. The salmon-pink coveralls he wore seemed brand-new, as if he had put them on just for this interview with Solar Network. Or had the managers of the center insisted that he wear new clothes for the interview? Whichever, she saw that the coveralls were at least a full size too big for the man. He seemed to be shrinking, withering away before her eyes.

But his voice was still strong. His eyes gleamed with distant memories.

"Sam Gunn," he repeated. "Thief. Liar. Warmonger. He almost caused World War III — did you know that?"

"No," said the reporter, truly surprised. She checked the recorder on her belt and slid a few centimeters closer to the old man, to make certain that the miniaturized device did not miss any of his words.

There was hardly any other noise in the big, dark, gloomy dome. Far off in the shadows sat a couple of other old people, as still as mummies, as if frozen by time and the indifference that comes from having outlived everyone you loved.

"A nuclear holocaust, that's what your Sam Gunn would have started. If not for *me*," Prokov tapped the folds of cloth that covered his sunken chest, "the whole world would have gone up in radioactive smoke thirty years ago."

"I never knew," said the reporter.

Without any other encouragement, Prokov began to speak in an ani-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mated, vigorous, and bitterly angry voice.

I was commander of Mir 5, the largest Soviet space station. My rank was full colonel. My crew had been in space for 638 days, and it was my goal to make it two full years — 730 days. It would be a new record. Fourteen men in orbit for two full years. I would be picked to command the Mars expedition if I could get my men to the two-year mark. A big if.

Sam Gunn, of course, was an American astronaut. Officially, he was a crew member of the NASA space station. Secretly, he worked for the CIA, I am certain. No other explanation fits the facts.

You must understand that despite all the comforts that socialist technology could provide, life aboard Mir 5 was — well, spartan. We worked in shifts and slept in hot beds. You know, when one man finished his sleep shift, he got up from his zippered bag, and a man who had just finished his work shift got into the bag to sleep. Sixteen hours of work, eight hours of sleep. Four bunks for twelve crewmen. It was all strictly controlled by ground command.

Of course, as colonel in command, I had my own bunk and my own private cubicle. This was not a deviation from socialist equality; it was necessary, and all the crew recognized that fact. My political officer also had his own private cubicle, naturally.

Believe me, after the first eighteen months of living under such stringencies, life became very tense inside Mir 5. Fourteen men cooped up inside a set of aluminum cans, with nothing but work, no way to relieve their tedium, forced to exercise when there were no other tasks to do —the tension was becoming dangerously high. Sam must have known that. I was told that the CIA employed thousands of psychologists in those days.

His first visit to our station was made to look like an accident. He waited until I was asleep to call us.

My second-in-command, a thick-headed Estonian named Korolev, shook me awake none too gently.

"Sir," he said, pummeling my zippered bag, "there's an American asking us for help!"

It was like being the toothpaste in a tube while some big oaf tries to squeeze you out.

"An Ameri — stop that! I'm awake! Get your hands off me!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fortunately, I slept in my coveralls. I simply unzippered the bag and followed Korolev toward the command center. He was a bulky fellow, a wrestler back at home and a decent electronics technician up here. But he had been made second-in-command by seniority only. His brain was not swift enough for such responsibilities.

The station was composed of nine modules — nine aluminum cans joined together by air locks. It was all under zero gravity, of course. It would still be several years before the Americans built their fancy rotating station.

We floated through the hatch of the command center, where four more of my men were hovering by the communications console. It was cramped and hot; six men in the center was at least one too many.

I immediately heard why they had awakened me.

"Hey, are you guys gonna help me out, or let me die?" a sharp-edged voice was rasping on our radio receiver. "I got a dead friggin' OTV here, and I'm gonna drift right past you and out into the Van Allen Belt and fry my ass if you don't come and get me."

That was my introduction to Sam Gunn.

Zworkin, my political officer, was already in contact with ground control, reporting on the incident. On my own authority — and citing the reciprocal rescue treaty that had been in effect for more than two decades — I sent one of our orbital transfer vehicles with two of my best men to rescue him.

His vehicle's rocket-propellant line had ruptured, with the same effect as if your automobile fuel line had split apart. The rocket engine died, and he was drifting without power.

"Goddamn cheap Hong Kong parts." Sam kept up a running monologue all through our rescue mission. "Bad enough we gotta fly birds built by the lowest bidders, but now they're buying parts from friggin' toy manufacturers! Whole goddamn vehicle works like something put together from a Mattel kit by a brain-damaged chimpanzee. Those mother-humpers in Washington don't give a shit whose neck they put on the mother-humpin' line as long as it ain't theirs."

And so on, all through the three hours it took for us to send out a two-man transfer vehicle, take him aboard it, and bring him safely to our station.

Once he came through the air lock and actually set foot inside Mir 5,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

his tone changed. Of course, "set foot" is a euphemism. We were all weightless, and Sam floated into the docking chamber, turned himself a full 360 around, and grinned at us.

All twelve of us had crowded into the docking chamber to see him. This was the most excitement we had had since Boris Malenovsky's diarrhea, six months earlier.

"Hey!" said Sam. "You guys are as short as me!"

No words of thanks. No formal greeting or offers of international friendship. His first words upon being rescued dealt with our heights.

He was no taller than my own 160 centimeters, although he claimed to be 165. He pushed himself next to Korolev, the biggest man of our crew, who stood almost 173 centimeters, according to his medical file. Naturally, under zero gravity he — and all of us — had grown an extra two or three centimeters.

"I'm just about as tall as you are!" Sam exulted.

He flitted from one member of our crew to another, comparing heights. It was difficult to make an accurate measurement, because in zero gravity he kept bobbing up slightly. He cheated, in other words. I should have recognized this as the key to his character immediately. Unfortunately, I did not.

Neither did Zworkin, although he later claimed that he knew all along that Sam was a spy.

All in all, Sam was not unpleasant. He was friendly; he was noisy. I remember thinking, in those first few moments he was aboard our station, that it was like having a pet monkey visit us. Amusing. Diverting. He made us laugh, which was something we had not done in many weeks.

Sam's face was almost handsome, but not quite. His lips were a bit too thin and his jaw a little too stubbornly square. His eyes were dark and glowing like a fanatic's. His hair was thick and medium brown. His tongue was never still.

Most of my crew understood English well enough so that Sam had little trouble expressing himself. Which he did incessantly. Sam kept up a constant chatter about the shoddy construction of his orbital transfer vehicle, the solid workmanship of our station, the lack of esthetics in spacecraft design, the tyranny of ground controllers who forbade alcoholic beverages aboard the space stations, this, that, and the other. He even managed to say a few words that sounded almost like gratitude.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"I guess giving you guys a chance to save my neck made a nice break in the routine for you, huh? Not much else exciting going on around here, is there?"

He talked so much and so fast that it never occurred to any of us, not even Zworkin, to ask why he had been flying so near to us. As far as I knew, there were no Western satellites in orbits this close to our station. Or there should not have been.

Next to his machine-gun monologue, the thing that impressed my men most about this American astronaut was his uniform. Like ours, it was basically a one-piece coverall, quite utilitarian. Like us, he bore a name patch over his left chest pocket. There the similarities ended.

Sam's coveralls were festooned with all sorts of fancy patches and buttons. Not merely shoulder patches that showed the mission he was flying. He had patches and insignia running down both sleeves and across his torso, both front and back. Dragons, comic-book rocket ships, silhouettes of naked women, buttons that bore pictures of video stars, strange symbols and slogans that made no sense to me, such as "Beam me up, Scotty, there's no intelligent life down here" and "King Kong died for our sins."

Finally, I ordered my men back to their duties and told Sam to accompany me to the control center.

Zworkin objected. "It is not wise to allow him to see the control center," he said in Russian.

"Would you prefer," I countered, "that he be allowed to roam through the laboratories? Or perhaps visit the laser module?"

Most of my own crew were not allowed to enter the laser module. Only men with specific military clearance were permitted there. And most of the laboratories, of course, were testing systems that would one day be the heart of our Red Shield antimissile system. Even the diamond-manufacturing experiment was a Red Shield program, according to my mission orders.

Zworkin did not reply to my question. He merely glared at me sullenly. He had a sallow, pinched face that was blemished with acne — unusual for a man of his age. The crew joked, behind his back, that he was still a virgin.

"The visitor stays with me, Nikolai Nikolaivich," I told him. "Where I can watch him."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Unfortunately, I had to listen to Sam as well as watch him.

I ordered my communications technician to contact the NASA space station and allow Sam to tell them what had happened. Meanwhile, Zworkin reported again to ground control. It was not a simple matter to transfer Sam back to the NASA space station. First we had to apprise ground control of the situation, and they had to inform Moscow, where the American embassy and the International Astronautical Commission were duly briefed. Hours dragged by, and our work schedule became completely snarled.

I must admit, however, that Sam was a good guest. He handed out trinkets that he fished from the deep pockets of his coveralls. A miniature penknife to one of the men who had rescued him. A pocket computer to the other, programmed to play a dozen different games when it was connected to a display screen. A small, flat tin of rock candy. A Russian-English dictionary the size of your thumb.

That dictionary should have alerted my suspicions. But I confess that I was more concerned with getting this noise intrusion off my station and back where he belonged.

Sam stayed a day. Two days. Teleconferences crackled between Moscow and Washington, Moscow and Geneva, Washington and Geneva, ground control to our station, our station to the NASA station. Meanwhile, Sam had made himself at home and even started to learn how to tell jokes in Russian. He was particularly interested in dirty jokes, of course, being the kind of man he was. He began to peel off some of his patches and buttons that adorned his coveralls and hand them out as presents. My crewmen especially lusted after the pictures of beautiful video stars.

He had taken over the galley, where he was teaching my men how to play dice in zero gravity, when I finally got permission to send him back to the American station. Not an instant too soon, I thought.

Still dear old Mir 5 became suddenly very quiet and dreary once we had packed him off in one of our own reliable transfer craft. We returned to our tedious tasks and the damnable exercise machines. Men growled and sulked at each other. Months of boredom and hard work stretched ahead of us. I could feel the tension pulling at my crew. I felt it myself.

But not for long.

Less than a week later, Korolev again rousted me from my zipper bunk.

"He's back! The American!"

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This time, Sam did not pretend to need an emergency rescue. He had flown an orbital transfer vehicle to our station and matched orbit. His OTV was hovering a few hundred meters alongside us.

"Permission to come aboard?" His voice was unmistakable. "Unofficially?"

I glanced at Zworkin, who was of course right beside me in the command center. Strangely, Nikolai Nikolaivich nodded. Nothing is unofficial with him, I knew. Yet he did not object to the American making an "unofficial" visit.

I went to the docking chamber while Sam floated over to us. The air lock of his craft would not fit our docking mechanism, so he went EVA in his pressure suit and jetted over to us using his backpack maneuvering unit.

"I was in the neighborhood, so I thought I'd drop by for a minute," Sam wisecracked once he got through our air lock and slid up the visor of his helmet.

"Why are you in this area?" Zworkin asked, eyes slitted in his pimpled face.

"To observe your laser tests," replied Sam, grinning. "You guys don't think our intelligence people don't know what you're up to, do you?"

"We are not testing lasers!"

"Not today, I know. Don't worry about it, Ivan, I'm not spying on you, for Chrissakes."

"My name is not Ivan!"

"I just came to thank you guys for saving my ass." Sam turned slightly, his entire body pivoting weightlessly toward me. He reached into the pouches on the legs of his suit. "A couple of small tokens of my gratitude."

He pulled out two black oblong boxes and handed them to me. Videocassettes.

"Latest Hollywood releases," Sam explained. "With my thanks."

In a few minutes he was gone. Zworkin insisted on looking at the videos before anyone else could see them. "Probably capitalist propaganda," he grumbled.

I insisted on seeing them with him. I wasn't going to let him keep them all for himself.

One of the videos was the very popular film *Rocky XVIII*, in which a geriatric former prizefighter is rejuvenated and gets out of his wheelchair

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

to beat a nine-foot-tall robot for the heavyweight championship of the world.

"Disgusting," spat Zworkin.

"But it will be good to show the crew how low the capitalists sink in their pursuit of money," I said.

He gave me a sour look, but did not argue.

The second video was a rock musical that featured decadent music at extreme decibel levels, decadent youths wearing outlandish clothes and weird hairdos, and decadent young women wearing hardly any clothes at all.

"Definitely not for the crew to see," said Zworkin. And none of us ever saw that video again. He kept it. But now and then I heard the music, faintly, from his private cubicle during the shifts when he was supposed to be sleeping. Mysteriously, his acne began to clear up.

Almost two weeks afterward, Sam popped up again. Again he asked permission to come aboard, claiming this time that he was on a routine inspection mission of a commsat in geosynchronous orbit and had planned his return to the NASA station to take him close to us. He was a remarkable pilot; that much I must admit.

"Got a couple more videos for you," he added, almost as an afterthought.

Zworkin immediately okayed his visit. The rest of my crew, who had cheered the rejuvenated Rocky in his proletarian struggle against the stainless-steel symbol of Western imperialism (as we saw it), welcomed him aboard.

Sam stayed for a couple of hours. We fed him a meal of borscht, soy-steak, and ice cream. With plenty of hot tea.

"That's the best ice cream I've ever had!" Sam told me as we made our weightless way from the galley back to the docking chamber, where he had left his pressure suit.

"We get fresh shipments every week," I said. "Our only luxury."

"I never knew you guys had such great ice cream." He was really marveling over it.

"Moscow is famous for its ice cream," I replied.

With a shake of his head that made his whole body sway slightly, Sam admitted, "Boy, we got nothing like that back at the NASA station."

"Would you like to take some back to your station?" I asked. Fool that I am, I did not realize that he had maneuvered me into making the offer.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Gee, yeah," he said, like a little boy.

I had one of the men pack him a container of ice cream while he struggled into his pressure suit. Zworkin was off screening the two new videos Sam had brought, so I did not bother him with the political question of offering a gift in return for Sam's gift.

As he put the helmet over his head, Sam said to me in a low voice, "Each of those videotapes is a double feature."

"A what?"

Leaning close to me, so that the technician in charge of the docking air lock could not hear, he whispered, "Play the tape backward at half speed, and you'll see another whole video. But *you* look at it yourself first. Don't let that sourball of a political officer see it, or he'll confiscate them both."

I felt puzzled, and my face must have shown it. Sam merely grinned, patted me on the shoulder, and said, "Thanks for the ice cream."

Then he left.

It took a little ingenuity to figure out how to play the videos backward at half speed. It took even more cleverness to arrange to look at them in private, without Zworkin or any of the other crew members hanging over my shoulder. But I did it.

The "second feature" on each of the tapes was pornographic filth. Disgusting sexual acrobatics featuring beautiful women with large breasts and apparently insatiable appetites. I watched the degrading spectacles several times, despite stern warnings from my conscience. If I had been cursed with acne, these videos would undoubtedly have solved the problem. Especially the one with the trapeze.

For the first time since I had been a teenager buying contraband blue jeans, I faced a moral dilemma. Should I tell Zworkin about these secret pornographic films? He had seen only the normal, "regular" features on each tape: an ancient John Wayne Western and a brand-new comedy about a computer that takes over Wall Street.

In my own defense, I say only that I was thinking of the good of my crew when I made my decision. The men had been in orbit for nearly 650 days, with almost two full months to go before we could return to our loved ones. The pornographic films might help them to bear the loneliness and perform better at their tasks.

But only if Zworkin did not know about them.

I decided to chance it. One by one, I let the crew in on the little secret.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Morale improved 600 percent. Performance and productivity rose equally. The men smiled and laughed a lot more. I told myself it was just as much because they were pulling one over on the puritanical Zworkin as because they were watching Oral Roberta and her buxom girlfriend Electric (AC/DC) Edna.

Sam returned twice more, swapping tapes for ice cream. He was our friend. He apparently had an inexhaustible supply of videos, each of them a "double feature." While Zworkin spent the next few weeks happily watching the regular features on each video and perspiring every time he saw a girl in a bikini, the rest of us watched the adventures of airline stewardesses, movie starlets, models, housewife-hookers, and other assorted and sordid specimens of female depravity.

The days flew by, with each man counting the hours until Sam showed up with another few videos. We stopped eating ice cream so that we would have plenty to give him in return.

But then Sam sprang his trap on us. On me.

"Listen," he said as he was suiting up in the docking chamber, preparing to leave. "Next time, how about sticking a couple of those diamonds you're making into the ice cream."

I blinked with surprise and automatically looked over my shoulder at the technician standing by to operate the air lock. He was busy admiring the four new videos Sam had brought, wondering what was in them as he studied their labels.

"What are you talking about?" I meant to say it out loud, but it came out as a whispered croak.

Sam flashed a cocky grin at me. "Come on, everybody knows you guys are making gem-quality diamonds out of methane gas in your zero-gee facility. Pump a little extra methane in and make me a couple to sell Earthside. I'll split the profits with you fifty-fifty."

"Impossible," I said. Softly.

His smile became shrewd. "Look, Greg, old pal, I'm not asking for military secrets. Just a couple stones I can peddle back Earthside. We can both make a nice wad of money."

"The diamonds we manufacture are not of gemstone quality," I lied.

"Let my friends on Forty-seventh Street decide what quality they are," Sam whispered.

"No."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Now I had a real dilemma on my hands. Give in to Sam's blackmail?

He puffed out a sad sigh. "This has nothing to do with politics, Greg. It's business. Capitalism."

I shook my head hard enough to sway my entire body.

Sam seemed to accept defeat. "O.K. It's a shame, though. Hell, even your leaders in the Kremlin are making money selling their biographies to Western publishers. Capitalism is creeping up on you."

I said nothing.

He pulled the helmet over his head, fastened the neck seal. But before sliding down his visor, he asked, quite casually, "What happens to you if Zworkin finds out what's on the videos you guys have been watching?"

My face went red. I could feel the heat flaming my cheeks.

"Just a couple of little diamonds, pal. A couple of carats. That's not so much to ask for, is it?"

He went through the air lock and jetted back to his own craft. I would have gladly throttled him, at that moment.

Now I had a *real* dilemma on my hands. Give in to Sam's blackmail, or face Zworkin and the authorities back on the ground. It would not only be I who would be in trouble, but my entire crew. They did not deserve to suffer because of my bad decisions, but they would. We would all spend the rest of our lives shoveling cow manure in Siberia or running mining machines on the Moon.

I had been corrupted, and I knew it. Oh, I had the best of motives, the loftiest of intentions. But how would they appear next to the fact that I had allowed my crew to watch disgusting pornographic films provided by a capitalist agent of the CIA? Corruption, pure and simple. I would be lucky to be sentenced to Siberia.

I gave in to Sam's demands. I told myself it was for the sake of my crew, but it was to save my own neck, and to save my dear family from disgrace. I had the technicians make three extra small diamonds, and embedded them in the ice cream when Sam made his next visit.

This was the exact week, of course, when the USSR and the Western powers were meeting in Geneva to decide on deployment of space weapons. Our own Red Shield system and the American Star Wars system were

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

well into the testing phase. We had conducted a good many of the tests ourselves, aboard Mir 5. Now the question was, Does each side begin to deploy its own system, or do we hammer out some method of working cooperatively?

Sam returned a few days later. I did not want to see him, but was afraid not to. He seemed happy and cheerful, and carried no fewer than six new videos with him. I spoke to him very briefly, very coldly. He seemed not to be bothered at all. He laughed and joked. And passed me a note on a tiny scrap of paper as he handed me the new videos.

I read the note in the privacy of my cubicle, after he left. "Good stuff. Worth a small fortune. How many can you provide each week?"

I was accustomed to the weightlessness of zero gravity, but at that instant I felt as if I were falling into a deep, dark pit, falling and falling down into an utterly black well that had no bottom.

To make matters worse, after a few days of progress, the conference at Geneva seemed to hit a snag for some unfathomable reason. The negotiations stopped dead, and the diplomats began to snarl at each other in the old cold war fashion. The world was shocked. We received orders to accelerate our tests of the Red Shield laser that had been installed in the laboratory module at the aft end of our station.

We watched TV news broadcasts from every part of the world (without letting ground control know it, of course). Everyone was frightened at the sudden intransigence in Geneva.

Zworkin summed up all our fears. "The imperialists want an excuse to strike us with their nuclear missiles before our Red Shield defense is deployed."

I had to admit he was probably right. What scared me was the thought that *we* might strike at *them* before their Star Wars defense was deployed. Either way, it meant the same thing: nuclear holocaust.

Even thickheaded Korolev seemed worried. "Will we go to war?" he kept asking. "Will we go to war?" No one knew.

To make matters still worse, in the midst of our laser test preparations, Sam sent a radio message that he was on his way; he would rendezvous with our station in three hours, and he had "something special" for us.

The crisis in Geneva meant nothing to him, it seemed. He was coming for "business as usual." Zworkin had been right all along about him. Sam was a spy. I knew it now.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A vision formed in my mind. I would personally direct the test of the Red Shield laser. Its high-energy beam would "happen" to strike the incoming American spacecraft. Sam Gunn would be fried like a scrawny chicken in a hot oven. A regrettable accident. Yes. It would solve my problem.

Except — it could create such a furor on Earth that the conference in Geneva would break up altogether. It could be the spark that would lead to war, nuclear war.

Yet — Sam had no business flying an American spacecraft so close to a Soviet station. Both the U.S. and USSR had clearly proclaimed that the regions around their stations were sovereign territory, not to be violated by the other side's craft. Sam's visits to Mir 5 were strictly illegal, secret, clandestine, except for his first "emergency" visit. If we fried him, we would be within our legal rights.

On the other hand — could the entire crew remain silent about Sam's many visits? Would Zworkin stay silent, or would he denounce me once we had returned to Mother Russia?

On the *other* hand — what difference would any of that make if we triggered nuclear war?

That is why I found myself sweating in the laser laboratory attached to the aft end of the station, a few hours after Sam's call. He knew that we were going to test the laser; he had to know. That was why he was cheerfully heading our way at this precise point in time.

The laboratory was chilly; the three technicians operating the giant laser wore bulky sweaters over their coveralls, and gloves with the fingers cut out so they could manipulate their sensitive equipment properly. But I was sweating buckets.

This section of the station was a complete module in itself; it could be detached and de-orbited, if necessary, and a new section put in its place. The huge laser filled the laboratory almost completely. If we had not been in zero gravity, it would have been impossible for the technicians to climb into the nooks and crannies necessary to service all the equipment.

One wide optical-quality window gave me a view of the black depths of space. But no window could withstand the incredible intensity of the laser's high-power beam. The beam was instead directed through a polished copper pipe to the outside of the station's hull, which was why the laboratory was always so cold. It was impossible to keep the module

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

decently warm; the heat leaked out through the laser-beam channel. On the outer end of that channel was the aiming mirror (also polished copper), which directed the beam toward its target — hypothetical or actual.

I had calculated Sam's approach trajectory back at the control center and pecked the numbers into my hand computer. Now, as the technicians labored and grumbled over their big laser, I gave them those coordinates as their target. As far as they knew, they were firing the multimegawatt laser beam into empty space, as usual. Only I knew that when they fired the laser, its beam would destroy the approaching Yankee spacecraft and kill Sam Gunn.

The moments ticked by as I sweated coldly, miserable with apprehension and — yes, I admit it freely — with guilt. I had ordered the technicians to program my numbers into the laser's aiming mirror; the big slab of polished copper hanging outside the station's hull was already tracking Sam's trajectory, turning ever so slightly each second. The relays directing its motion clicked inside the laboratory like the tapping of a Chinese water torture, like the clicks of a quartz clock.

Then I heard the sighing sound that happens when an airtight hatch between two modules of the station is opened. Turning, I saw the hatch swinging open, its heavy hinges groaning slightly. Zworkin pushed through and floated around the bulky master control console to my side.

"You show an unusual interest in this test," he said softly.

My insides blazed as if I had stuck my hand into the power outlet. "There is the crisis in Geneva," I replied. "Moscow wants this test to proceed flawlessly."

"Will it?"

I did not trust myself to say anything more. I merely nodded.

Zworkin watched the muttering technicians for a few endless moments, then asked, "Do you find it odd that the American is approaching us *exactly* at the time our test is scheduled?"

I nodded once again, keeping my eyes fixed on the empty point in space where I imagined the beam and Sam's spacecraft would intersect.

"I received an interesting message from Moscow, less than an hour ago," Zworkin said. I dared not look into his face, but his voice sounded brittle, tense. "The rumor is that the Geneva conference has struck a reef made of pure diamond."

"What?" That spun me around. He was not gloating. In fact, he looked

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

just as worried as I felt. No, not even worried. Frightened. The tone of voice that I had assumed was sarcasm was actually the tight, dry voice of fear.

"This is an unconfirmed rumor, mind you," Zworkin said, "but what they are saying is that the NATO intelligence service has learned we are manufacturing pure diamond crystals in zero gravity, diamond crystals that can be made large enough to be used as mirrors and windows in extremely high-power lasers. They are concerned that we have moved far ahead of them in this key area of technology."

Just at that instant, Sam's cocky voice chirped over the stations' intercom speakers. "Hey there, friends and neighbors, here's your Hollywood delivery service, comin' atcha."

The laser mirror clicked again. And again. One of the technicians floated back to the console at my side and pressed the three big red rocker switches that turned on the electrical power, one after the other. The action made his body rise up to the low ceiling of the laboratory each time. He bounced up and down slowly, like a bubble trapped in a sealed glass.

A low whine came from the big power generators, which were in a separate module of the station. I could feel their vibration through my boots.

In my mind's eye, I saw a thin yellow line that represented the trajectory of Sam's spacecraft, approaching us. And a heavier red line, the fierce beam of our laser, reaching out to meet it.

"Got something more than videos, this trip," Sam was chattering. "Managed to lay my hands on some really cute electronic toys — interactive games; you'll love 'em. Got the latest sports videos, too, and a bucketful of real-beef hamburgers. All you gotta do is pop 'em in your microwave. Brought mustard and ketchup, too. Better'n that soy stuff you guys been eating. . . ."

He was talking his usual blue streak. I was glad that the communications technicians knew to scrub his transmissions from the tapes that ground control monitored. Dealing with Zworkin was bad enough. . . .

Through his inane gabbling, I could hear the mirror relays clicking, like the rifles of a firing squad being cocked, one by one. Sam approached us, blithely unaware of what awaited him. I pictured his spacecraft being hit by the laser beam, exploding, Sam and his videos and hamburgers all

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

transformed instantly into an expanding red-hot ball of bloody vapor.

I reached over and pounded the master switch on the console. Just like the technician, I bounded toward the ceiling. The power generators wound down and went silent.

Zworkin stared up at me as I gently bumped my head and floated down toward him again.

I could not kill him. I could not murder Sam in cold blood, no matter what the consequences might be.

"What are you doing?" Zworkin demanded.

Putting out a hand to grasp the console and steady myself, I said. "We should not run this test while the Yankee spy is close enough to watch."

He eyed me shrewdly, then called to the two dumbfounded technicians. "Out! Both of you! Until your commander calls for you again."

Shrugging and exchanging confused looks, the two young men left the laboratory. Zworkin swung the hatch shut behind them, leaning against it as he gave me a long, quizzical stare.

"Grigori Aleksandrovich," he said at last, "we must do something about this American. If ground control ever finds about him — if *Moscow* ever finds out. . . ."

"What was it you said about the diamond crystals?" I asked. "Do you think the imperialists know about our experiments here?"

"Of course they do! And this Yankee spy is at the heart of the matter."

"What should we do?"

Zworkin rubbed his chin, but said nothing. I could not help thinking, absurdly, that his acne was almost totally gone.

So we allowed Sam aboard the station once again, and I took him immediately to my private cubicle.

"Kripes!" he chirped. "I've seen bigger coffins. Is this the best that the workers' paradise can do for you?"

"No propaganda now," I whispered sternly. "And no more blackmail. You will not return to this station again, and you will not get any more diamonds from me."

"And no more ice cream?" He seemed entirely unconcerned with the seriousness of the situation.

"No more anything," I said, straining to make it as strong as I could while still whispering. "Your visits here are finished. Over and done with."

Sam made a rueful grin and wormed his right hand into the hip pocket

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of his coveralls. "Read this," he said, handing me a slip of paper.

It had two numbers on it, both of them in six digits.

"The first is your private bank account number at the Bank of Bern, in Switzerland."

"Soviet citizens are not allowed to—"

"The second number," Sam ignored me, "is the amount of money deposited in your account, in Swiss francs."

"I told, you I am not—" I stopped and looked at the second number again. I was not certain of the exchange ratio between Swiss francs and rubles, but six digits are six digits.

Sam laughed softly. "Listen. My friends in New York have friends in Switzerland. That's how I set up the account for you. It's your half of the profit from those little stones you gave me."

"I don't believe it. You are attempting to bribe me!"

His look became pitying. "Greg, old pal, three-quarters of your Politburo have accounts in Switzerland. Don't you realize that the big conference in Geneva is stalled over—"

"Over your report to the CIA that we are manufacturing diamonds here in this station!" I hissed. "You are a spy; admit it!"

He grinned and spread his hands in the universal gesture of helplessness. "O.K., so I've passed some info over to the IDA. . . ."

"Don't you mean CIA?"

Sam blinked with surprise. "CIA? Why in hell would I want to talk to those spooks? I'm dealing with the IDA."

"Intelligence Defense Agency," I said.

He shook his head in annoyance. "Naw — the International Diamond Association. The diamond cartel. You know, DeBeers and those guys."

I was too stunned with surprise to say anything.

"The cartel know you were doing zero-gravity experiments in manufacturing diamonds. Once my friends in New York saw the quality of the stones you gave me, they sent word hotfooting to Amsterdam."

"The international diamond cartel. . . ."

"That's right, pal," said Sam. "They don't want space-manufactured diamonds kicking the bottom out of their market."

"But the crisis in Geneva," I mumbled.

Sam laughed. "The argument in Geneva is between the diamond cartel and your own government. It's got nothing to do with Star Wars or Red

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Shield. They've forgotten all about that. Now they're talking about *money!*"

I could not believe what he was saying. "Our leaders would never stoop. . . ."

Sam silenced me with a guffaw. "Your leaders are haggling with the cartel like a gang of housewives at a warehouse sale. The general secretary is talking with the cartel's leaders right now, over a private two-way fiber-optic TV link."

"How do you know this?"

He reached into the big pocket on the thigh of his suit. "Special video recording. I brought it just for you." With a sly smile, he added, "Can't trust those guys in Amsterdam, you know."

It was difficult to catch my breath. My head was swimming.

"Listen to me, Greg. Your leaders are going to join the diamond cartel; they're just haggling over the price."

"Impossible!"

"Hard to believe that good socialists would help the evil capitalists rig the world price for diamonds? But that's what's going on right now, so help me. And once they've settled on their terms, the conference in Geneva will get back on track."

"You're lying. I can't believe that you are telling me the truth."

He shrugged good-naturedly. "Look at the video. Watch what happened in Geneva. Then, when things settle down, you and I can start doing business again."

I must have shaken my head unconsciously.

"Don't want to leave all those profits to the cartel, do you? We can make a fair-sized piece of change — as long as we stay small enough so the cartel won't notice us. That's still a lot of money, pal."

"Never," I said. And I meant it. To do what he asked would mean working against my own nation, my own people, my own government. If the KGB ever found out!

I personally ushered Sam back to the docking compartment and off the station. And never allowed him back on Mir 5 again, no matter how he pleaded and wheedled us over the radio.

After several weeks, he finally realized that I would not deal with him — that when I said "never," that was exactly what I meant.

"O.K., friends," his radio voice said, the last time he tried to contact

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

us. "Guess I'll just have to find some other way to make my first million. So long, Greg. Enjoy the worker's paradise, pal."

The old man's tone had grown distinctly wistful. He stopped, made a deep wheezing sigh, and ran a liver-spotted hand over his wrinkled pate.

The reporter had forgotten the chill of the big lunar dome. Leaning slightly closer to Prokov, she asked:

"And that's the last you saw or heard of Sam Gunn?"

"Yes," said the Russian. "And good riddance, too."

"But what happened after that?"

Prokov's aged face twisted unhappily. "What happened? Everything went exactly as he said it would. The conference in Geneva started up again, and East and West reached a new understanding. My crew achieved its mission goal; we spent two full years in Mir 5 and then went home. The USSR became a partner in the international diamond cartel."

"And you went to Mars," the reporter prompted.

Prokov's wrinkled face became bitter. "No. I was not picked to command the Mars expedition. Zworkin never denounced me, never admitted his own involvement with Sam, but his report on me was damning enough to knock me out of the Mars mission. The closest I got to Mars was a weather observation station in Antarctica!"

"Wasn't the general secretary at that time the one who—"

"The one who retired to Switzerland after he stepped down from leading the Party. Yes. He is living there still, like a capitalist millionnaire."

"And you never dealt with Sam Gunn again?"

"Never! I told him never, and that is exactly what I meant. Never."

"Just that brief contact with him was enough to wreck your career."

Prokov nodded stonily.

"Yet," the reporter mused, "in a way it was *you* who got the USSR into partnership with the diamond cartel. That must be worth hundreds of millions each year to your government."

The old man's only reply was a bitter, "Pah!"

"What happened to *your* Swiss bank account? The one Sam started for you?"

Prokov waved a hand in a gesture that swept the lunar dome and asked, "How do you think I can afford to live here?"

The puzzled reporter frowned. "I thought the Leonov Center was free. . . ."

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"Yes, of course it is. A retirement center for Heroes of the Soviet Union. Absolutely free! Unless you want some real beef in your Stroganoff. That costs extra. Or an electric blanket for your bed. Or chocolates — chocolates from Switzerland are the best of all, you know."

"You mean that Swiss bank account. . . ."

"It is an annuity," said Prokov. "Not much money, but a nice little annuity to pay for some of the extra frills. The money sits there in the bank, and every month the faithful Swiss gnomes send me the interest by radiophone. Compared to the other Heroes living here, I am a well-to-do man. I can even buy vodka for them."

The reporter suppressed a smile. "So Sam's bank deposit is helping you, even after all those years."

Slowly, the old man nodded. "Yes, he is helping me even after his death." His voice sank lower. "And I never thanked him. Never. Never spoke a kind word to him."

"He was a difficult man to deal with," said the reporter. "A very difficult personality."

"A thief," Prokov replied. But his voice was so soft that it sounded almost like a blessing. "A blackmailer. A scoundrel."

There were tears in his weary eyes. "How I wish he were here. I knew him for only a few months. He frightened me half to death and nearly caused a nuclear war. He disrupted my crew and ruined my chance to lead the Mars expedition. He tricked me and used me shamefully. . . ."

The reporter made a sympathetic noise.

"Yet even after all these years, the memory of him makes me smile. He made life exciting, vibrant. How I miss him!"

(From page 40)

terms? I imagine that it would be possible — if the filmmaker had enough respect for the written word to bring the novelizer into his confidence and make him a collaborator. But when has Lucas — or any other sf/fantasy filmmaker — ever shown any evidence of knowing how to read a whole book? There are a few. John Boorman. James Cameron. Maybe some others I've missed. But to most of them, the novelization is exactly as important as the board game, the T-shirts, the action figures, and the coloring books. If *Willow* is a second-rate book, it isn't Wayland Drew's fault — he's a pretty good translator. It's George Lucas's fault.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SPECIAL CHRISTMAS RATES

THE MAGAZINE OF
Fantasy&ScienceFiction

$17.97 for the first one-year subscription

$14.00 for each additional one-year subscription

Send Fantasy and Science Fiction as a Christmas gift:

(PLEASE PRINT)

To _____
Name of Recipient

Street _____

City _____ State_____ Zip_____

(PLEASE PRINT)

To _____
Name of Recipient

Street _____

City _____ State_____ Zip_____

78N6XH

☐ I enclose $ _____

☐ Bill me after Christmas

☐ Enter my own subcription

☐ New ☐ Renewal

Foreign and Canadian postage: $5.00 per year. Make checks payable in U.S. funds, drawn on a U.S. bank.

My name _____

Street _____

City _____ State_____ Zip_____

Mercury Press, Inc.
P.O. Box 56
Cornwall, CT 06753

Gift cards will be sent to you, for you to personalize with your own signature.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Fantasy&ScienceFiction

MARKET PLACE

BOOKS-MAGAZINES

S-F FANTASY MAGAZINES, BOOKS. Catalog $1.00. Collections purchased (large or small). Robert Madle, 4406 Bestor Dr., Rockville, MD 20853.

SCIENTIFANTASY bought, sold. Catalog 25¢ stamp. Gerry de la Ree, Cedarwood, Saddle River, NJ 07458-2604.

PULPS, HARDBOUNDS, PAPERBACKS, 50 page catalog for $2, refundable with order. Graham Holroyd, 19 Borrowdale Dr., Rochester, NY 14626.

SEND 25¢ FOR CATALOG of Scientifantasy books & pulps. Canford, Drawer 216, Freeville, NY 13068.

FANTASTIC FICTION hardcover first editions. Catalogs issued. DMK BOOKS, 22946 Brenford, Woodland Hills, CA 91364.

BARRY R. LEVIN SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY LITERATURE. Rare and first editions. Catalogues issued. 726 Santa Monica Blvd., #201, Santa Monica, California 90401.

READ SF/F FOR LESS! Catalog $1.00, Refundable. T.D. Bell, Leahy Lane, Ballston Spa, NY 12020.

SCIENCE FICTION, FANTASY, SHERLOCKIANA, hardcovers, paperbacks, magazines. Free catalog. Brentwood Books, 3475 Sheila, Birmingham, Ala. 35216.

FREE CATALOGS of Science Fiction/Fantasy pulps, digests, paperbacks, hardcovers. Collections purchased (large or small). Ray Bowman, Box 167F, Carmel, IN 46032.

FREE CATALOG OF SCIENCE FICTION FANTASY Books, Hardcover, paperbacks. Pelanor Books, 7 Gaskill Ave., Albany, NY 12203.

125,000 SF and Mystery paperbacks, hardcovers, magazines in stock. Free catalogs. PANDORA'S BOOKS, Box F-54, Neche, ND 58265.

SOFT BOOKS, 89 Marion Street, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6R 1E6. Si. Fi., Fantasy, Horror, Lovecraft, Arkham, Scream, etc. bought/sold. Send for free Catalogue.

BUMP IN THE NIGHT BOOKS announces publication of its catalogue. Over sixty pages filled with the stuff nightmares are made of. $5.00-credited towards your first purchase. 133-135 Elfreths Alley, Philadelphia, PA 19106.

FOR SALE: 17 years of F&SF! Complete: January 1970 through December 1986. Best offer takes. S. Don, 317 Erdman Dr., Dauphin, PA 17018.

CASSETTES/AUDIO

OLD TIME RADIO PROGRAMS on quality tapes. Great classic science fiction! Also, comedy, mysteries, westerns, music. Free catalogue. Carl Y. Froelich, 2 Heritage Farm, New Freedom, Pennsylvania 17349.

MISCELLANEOUS

20% AND MORE OFF games and miniatures. Send $1.00 for catalog. Fantasy Apothecary, 1230 Boreas Drive, Orlando, FL 32822.

ATTENTION DRAGON LOVERS!! Annual membership includes quarterly newsletter. Send $8. (U.S.) $12. overseas to: The Dragon Society, 2430 Juan Tabo N.E., Suite 142-S, Albuquerque, N.M. 87112.

Do you have something to advertise to sf readers? Books, magazines typewriters, telescopes, computers, space-drives, or misc. Use the F&SF Market Place at these low, low rates: $15.00 for minimum of ten (10) words, plus $1.50 for each additional word. Frequency discount: 10% for six consecutive insertions, 15% for twelve consecutive insertions. Send copy and remittance to: Adv. Dept., Fantasy and Science Fiction, P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, CT 06753.

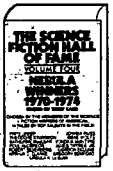
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.

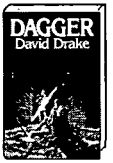
3814 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $10.98

5215 Spec. ed.
Club ed. $4.98

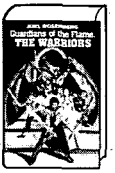
7229 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $4.98



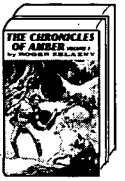
4259 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $6.98



★ **7252** Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $5.50



5520 The Sleeping Dragon; The Sword and the Chain; The Silver Crown.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $8.98

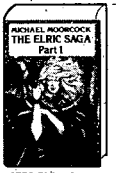


0075 The First 5 Novels. 2 vols.
Comb. pub. ed.
$32.30
Club ed. $8.98

7245 Pub. ed. $17.95
Club ed. $6.98

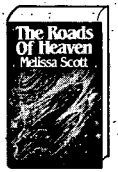
0141 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $4.98

0190 Pub. ed. $19.95
Club ed. $7.50

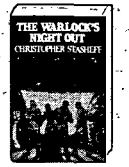


0752 Elric of Melnibone; The Sailor on the Seas of Fate; The Weird of the White Wolf.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $6.98

1172 The Vanishing Tower; The Bane of the Black Sword; Stormbringer.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.98



5116 Includes Five-Twelfths of Heaven; Silence in Solitude; The Empress of Earth.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $8.98

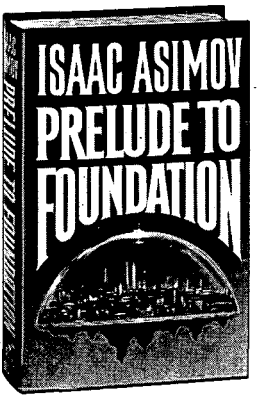


4390 The Warlock Wandering; The Warlock Is Missing.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.98

Yours *FREE!*

And take 4 more for $1 with membership.

▲ Exclusive hardcover edition
★ Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some



How the Club works: You'll receive your choice of any 4 books shown for only $1 (plus shipping & handling) and a FREE copy of *Prelude to Foundation* after your application for membership is accepted. We reserve the right to reject any application. However, once accepted as a member, you may examine the books in your home and, if not completely satisfied, return them within 10 days at Club expense. Your membership will be canceled and you'll owe nothing. The FREE book will be yours to keep whether or not you remain a member.

About every 4 weeks (14 times a year), we'll send you the Club's bulletin, *Things to Come*, describing 2 coming Selections and a variety of Alternate choices. In addition, up to 4 times a year you may receive offers of special Selections, always at low Club prices. If you want the 2 Selections, you need do nothing; they'll be shipped automatically.

If you don't want a Selection, prefer an Alternate or no book at all, just fill out the convenient form always provided and return it to us by the date specified.

We allow you at least 10 days for making your decision. If you do not receive the form in time to respond within 10 days and receive an unwanted Selection, you may return it at our expense.

As a member you need buy only 4 books at regular low Club prices during the coming year. You may resign anytime thereafter or continue to enjoy Club benefits for as long as you wish. One of the 2 Selections for the month is always only $4.98. Other Selections are higher, but always much less than hardcover publishers' editions—*UP TO 65% OFF.* The Club offers more than 400 books to choose from. Each volume printed on our special presses is produced on high-quality acid-free paper. A shipping and handling charge is added to all shipments. Send no money now, but do mail the coupon today!

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB®

Garden City, NY 11535

I want the best SF in or out of this world! Please accept my application for membership in the Science Fiction Book Club. Send me the 4 books whose numbers I have indicated below, plus my FREE book, and bill me just $1 (plus shipping and handling). I agree to the Club Plan as described in this ad. I will take 4 more books at regular low Club prices during the coming year and may resign anytime thereafter. The FREE book will be mine to keep whether or not I remain a member. The Club offers serious works for mature readers.

NOTE: Some books count as two choices; if you pick any of these, please put 9999 in the next box. DS 391

FREE BOOK #5314	1.	2.	3.	4.

If you would prefer an alternate FREE book, please indicate your selection here._____

Mr.
Ms._____

Address_____ Apt. #_____

City_____

State_____ Zip_____

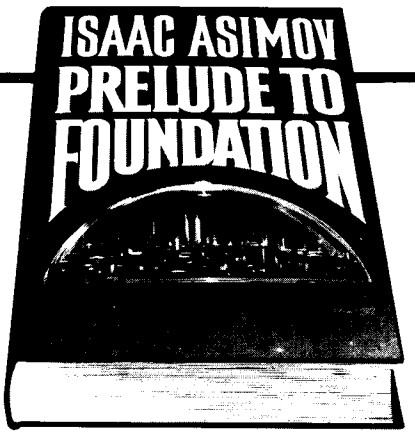
If under 18, parent must sign._____

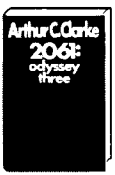
The Science Fiction Book Club offers its own complete hardbound editions sometimes altered in size to fit special presses and save you even more. Members accepted in U.S.A. and Canada only. Canadian members will be serviced from Canada. Offer slightly different in Canada.

33-SF16

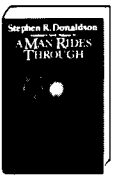
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Origin of THE FOUNDATION Revealed.





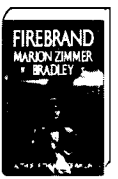
5355 Pub. ed. $17.95
Club ed. $4.98



4002 Pub. ed. $19.95
Club ed. $6.98

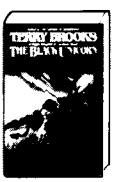
2964 Pub. ed. $19.95
Club ed. $6.98

Yours *FREE* with membership.



4358 Pub. ed. $19.95
Club ed. $6.98

4382 Pub. ed. $17.95
Club ed. $8.98



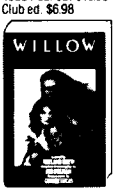
4861 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $5.98

7211 Pub. ed. $18.95
Club ed. $9.98

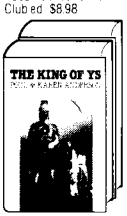
7237 Pub. ed. $16.95
Club ed. $4.98

+**5249** Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $6.98

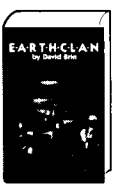
4408 Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $4.98



■**5330** Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $5.98

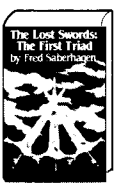


• ★ **5223/9999** Includes Roma Mater; Gallicenae; Dahut; The Dog and the Wolf. 2 Vols. Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $14.98



4218 Startide Rising; The Uplift War. Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $9.98

1420 Includes the First, Second and Third Books.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.98



7260 Includes Woundhealer's Story; Sightblinder's Story; Stonecutter's Story.
Comb. pub. ed. $45.85
Club ed. $7.98

3871 The Silent Tower; The Silicon Mage.
Spec. ed. ▲
Club ed. $7.50

★ **5322** Includes The Hall of the Mountain King; The Lady of Han-Gilen; A Fall of Princes. Comb. pub. ed. $51.85
Club ed. $9.98

3939 Pub. ed. $17.95
Club ed. $5.98

...PLUS 4 MORE BOOKS FOR $1

SCIENCE FICTION BOOK CLUB

SEE OTHER SIDE FOR ADDITIONAL SELECTIONS.

■TM & 1988 Lucasfilm Ltd. (LFL)
+Copyright 1988 Paramount Pictures Corporation All Rights Reserved.
STAR TREK Is A Registered Trademark Of Paramount Pictures Corporation.

▲ Exclusive hardcover edition
• Counts as two Selections
★ Explicit scenes and/or language may be offensive to some

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED